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THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

# ORAL SOURCES AND HISTORICAL STUDIES

by

JEAN ELAINE MANN KENDAL (C)

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH
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THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH

The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research, for acceptance, a thesis entitled ORAL SOURCES AND HISTORICAL STUDIES, submitted by JEAN ELAINE MANN KENDAL, in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of MASTER OF ARTS.

Supervisor

Date 9 April 1976

## ABSTRACT

The spoken word has been gaining in recognition and use as an historical source in recent decades. Partly this is due to an increased interest in more contemporary and less orthodox subjects for historical study--subjects for which oral testimony has always been available as a potential source. And partly it is a consequence of modern technology, which in some ways has undermined, and in other ways has enhanced, the possibilities for documenting human lives and events.

Chapters I and II of this paper respectively outline its contents and consider some terms which are basic to the discussion. Chapter III cites some examples, ancient and modern, of the gathering and use of oral testimony as an historical source. Chapter IV discusses the impact of modern technology on the historical record, and outlines the oral and audible documentary equivalents of traditional, mainly written, historical sources. Chapter V briefly states the case for more emphasis on contemporary subjects and oral sources in the general education of historians. Chapter VI discusses at length the many considerations involved in producing and using "oral history documents", which are consciously- and deliberately-crea-

ted historical sources. In Chapter VII some comments are made about the gathering and use of oral sources for historical studies in Canada. Chapter VIII is a brief conclusion. Notes are collected at the end of each chapter.

Appendices include: a chart showing relative value of oral sources for various subjects of historical inquiry (I); a report on the oral history collection of a Provincial Archives (IV), and on one particular oral history project (VI); the "Goals and Guidelines" of the (U.S.) Oral History Association (V); and extended excerpts from writings discussing, respectively, the necessity for making full and fully-documented records of oral testimony (II), "oral history and modern conditions" (III), and ancillary documentation for recorded oral testimony (VII).

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I wish to express my appreciation to all my teachers in the University of Alberta Department of History, and especially to my supervisor, Professor Lewis H. Thomas, of whose great patience I fear I took too much advantage, and of whose good advice I know I did not take enough.

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Responsibility for all deficiencies and errors is, of course, mine alone.

J. Elaine Mann Kendal

9 March 1976

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# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

The spoken word has been gaining in recognition and use as an historical source in recent decades. There are a number of factors contributing to the trend, and they have some interesting implications for historical studies. This paper undertakes to examine these factors and implications, and to consider the nature and validity of oral sources, and their usage in historical works.

The historian's business is basically to tell true stories about the past,[1] about "what was" and "what happened". This enterprise always depends on the availability and effective use of adequate sources. The lifetimes of people, events and situations yield records of themselves both intentionally and accidentally. These records take many forms, some being very durable, others quite transient. Realities or facts of the past are the historian's potential subjects. Surviving evidences of them are his sources.

The business of the contemporary historian in any age is to tell about its recent past. A source uniquely available to him for this purpose is "living

memory", his own and others' personal knowledge of "what was" and "what happened". Witnesses to and participants in recent events can often be persuaded to speak about their observations and experiences. Spoken testimony may document thoughts and deeds, or aspects of them, which would otherwise never leave a trace. It is also useful as a source of information on matters of the immediate past for which other documentation, though it exists, is not yet available to the contemporary historian. Oral testimony can of course be biassed and inaccurate, the bearer as much of fancy as of fact. Merely recording oral sources for use as historical or other data can be a problem. Whenever and wherever contemporary history has been ventured, both the value and the problems of oral sources as historical evidence have been well appreciated. To the extent that such ephemeral sources enter into contemporary historical and other works, they become part of the more permanent record and thus, for better or worse, a source for later historians.

There is a strong interest in contemporary history today, to judge by its present emphasis in publications and in educational curricula. One finds a considerable variety both of subjects being investigated, and of historians investigating them. The popular preoccupation with rapid and pervasive change, with the accelerating rate at which "present" conditions of every become "past", may be at the root of the current interest

in contemporary history.[2] It may also explain the wide front and the many levels on which that interest is being pursued. This interest in contemporary subjects would be reason enough for the recent trend to wider recognition and use of the spoken word as an historical source. For oral and other ephemeral sources are just as available and important to the contemporary historian today as they ever were. More so, if anything. This as a result of twentieth-century technology, which is itself a contributing factor in that trend. Modern technology has permitted the spoken word both a larger role in everyday life, and the possibility of a place in the permanent record. Spoken words to the multitude and between individuals can reach farther than ever before, thanks to radio and television broadcasting, the telephone and the airplane. The implication of these things for the contemporary historian immediately, and for the historical record in the long run, is this: more--and perhaps more significant--activity of a non-self-documenting nature is occurring. However, means for recording speech and sound, not to mention visual images, are also a part of modern technology. These have in effect provided historians with the novel possibility of "audible documents"[3] amongst the surviving records of the past, from this century on.

It would seem, then, that more historians in more fields are going to be confronted with oral sources.

The question arises whether historians are prepared for this eventuality. It is part of their ethic to take account of all possible surviving evidence, and to use it well. In one important respect they are well prepared to do this with oral sources. All historians worthy of the name today must be sophisticated source critics, both skeptical and resourceful in their approach to, and handling of, source material. But in another respect they are not as well prepared. Typically, historians conceive of sources rather narrowly, in terms of written documents. Those who take their cues from conventional training in the historian's craft, or from the precedents set by modern historical scholarship--and most do--are bound to look mainly to written sources, to pursue subjects for which there is ample written documentation, and to be at their resourceful and skeptical best when dealing with these sources. If one assumes that historians can transcend at will the limited terms of reference of their training and practice, one can assume that they are really well equipped by that traditional background to deal with less orthodox sources and subjects.

There are examples of contemporary historical work to illustrate that oral sources can indeed be used as imaginatively and critically as any others. But probably not until oral sources are given "the same attention we now devote to the use of manuscripts, statistics, public documents and artifacts"[4] in the general education of

historians, will these sources be considered a routine option the way written documents now are. Such a matter-of-course attitude would be desirable to achieve with regard to the spoken word as an historical source. An awareness of the role of the spoken word in human lives and events, such as is implied in that attitude, would do no historian harm, whatever field he chose, and whether or not he had any direct access to or use for oral sources in his work. If it happened that he did, he should be better able to take them in stride, and less inclined than many historians presently are to make either too little or too much of the spoken word as historical evidence. We would gladly do without inept usage and neglect of oral sources; we would just as gladly do without a cult of oral sources. A matter-of-course approach would go far to spare us both. It will be some time coming, however, and until then these sources are afflicted with "special status"--with all its fascinations and pitfalls--and special efforts must be made to deal with them.

Of course the historical is only one of many perspectives on contemporary phenomena, and possible usages of the spoken word as a source. Historians at a loss can turn for advice and examples here to journalism and social sciences like anthropology, psychology and sociology. These, for all their relative youth as fields or disciplines, have considerable experience gathering and analysing spoken testimony in their own ways for their own

particular purposes. Many of the principles and procedures they have evolved are directly applicable or readily adaptable to the work of contemporary historians. And it is no accident that at present many historians of less orthodox subjects, necessarily involving less orthodox source materials and/or interpretive criteria, are in fact journalists, anthropologists, psychologists and the like.

Even if the general historical methodology books do not yet reflect the fact, there has been no lack of initiative among certain historians themselves--and among archivists, who are the custodians of so much surviving evidence--in facing the issue of oral sources, as they have seen it loom larger with changing perspectives in historical studies and with the impact of twentieth-century technology. "Oral history" is a significant product of such initiative. It involves certain procedures and standards for the gathering and preservation of spoken memoirs in particular, and for their proper documentation and use in finished historical works. Oral history projects put these procedures and standards into practice; the oral history movement promotes them more widely among historians and archivists.

Advocates of oral history have addressed themselves to problems surrounding and inherent in at least some kinds of oral sources. They have considered the potential of oral reminiscences as historical evidence. They have challenged the lack of awareness and acceptance

of these sources in the wider community of historical scholarship. They have sought solutions to the undeniable problems of using these sources in a professional way. As their three decades' experience and observations are bound to illuminate a broader range of oral sources than just those specific to formal oral history, the views and activities of the "oral historians" will be worth considering in some detail in a discussion such as the present one.

It is also worthwhile to discuss any issue, no matter how abstract or general, at least partly in terms of our own country, region and locality--if only so as to add another dimension to our appreciation of them. But in the matter of oral sources for historical studies (as in only too many other matters) we in Canada, the Canadian West, Alberta, are obliged to appreciate our own situation only minimally on the basis of home-grown information, and beyond that, by reflecting on information from elsewhere, about others' experiences. It has been in other places, and particularly in the United States, that the possibilities for using oral sources in historical work have been explored most fully. The possibilities in Canada are only beginning to be explored. Hence the weight of emphasis, throughout much of this inquiry, on American statement and example. There is simply not yet enough Canadian statement and example to cover the ground adequately; though in a few years--very few, if the recent trend of

"awakening to ourselves" continues--this will no longer be the case. Then the issue of spoken words and audible documents as historical sources can be considered much more fully in our own terms. Yet it will probably never cease to be instructive to take some account of the experiences of the wider world, and to acknowledge that we are very much a part of it--subject to the same vogues in historical studies, for instance, and affected by the same technologies.

Overall, the matters to be explored in the course of this discussion are: the different kinds of oral sources available; the relationship of these to other forms of historical source material; the relevance and relative importance of oral and audible sources in various fields of historical inquiry; and attitudes to and uses of oral sources in published historical works.

NOTES TO CHAPTER I

1 Pardon E. Tillinghast, The Specious Past: Historians and Others, Reading, Mass., Addison-Wesley Publishing Co., 1972 (hereafter cited as: Tillinghast, Specious Past), p. 171.

2 Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., "On the Writing of Contemporary History," Atlantic Monthly, vol. 219 (March 1967) (hereafter cited as: Schlesinger, "Contemporary History"), pp. 69-70.

3 Edward Tatnall Canby, "Audio ETC: the Audible Document," Audio, vol. 8, no. 10 (October 1974), pp. 14-19 (hereafter cited as: Canby, "Audible Document").

4 Alfred B. Rollins, Jr., "The Voice as History," The Nation, vol. 205, no. 17 (20 November 1967) (hereafter cited as: Rollins, "Voice"), p. 521.

## CHAPTER II

## HISTORY, HISTORIANS, AND HISTORICAL SOURCES: SOME REFLECTIONS ON TERMS

"History", "historians" and "historical sources" are terms used frequently in this paper. They are basic ingredients in this discussion of "oral sources and historical studies." The intention here is to give the reader some impression of the assumptions being made about these terms, the meanings intended and the aspects emphasised by this writer throughout the present discussion.

In the introduction, historians were referred to as being basically tellers of true stories about the past. The characterisation is conveniently broad: it need neither belittle the work of the most magisterial of historians, nor disqualify that of the most humble. The characterisation is also conveniently vague: it says little about necessary qualifications or procedures, the admissible range of which is so large that any specification is likely to result in the exclusion of someone deserving of inclusion. But it is still a meaningful common denominator for the whole range of historians, from the esoteric scholar, through the professional or amateur

populariser, to "every man his own historian." One could even say that those who contribute to the historical record, including writers, artists, archivists, diarists, bearers of oral tradition, are in some sense historians; though one must always distinguish between conscious intent and accidental result. In any case, historianship can indeed be a wide domain.

There are many possible kinds of images of the past: "true", mythical and fictitious ones. The sources for these images, and the human purposes for seeking or accepting them, may sometimes be quite similar. There are limits to the imaginative reconstruction allowable in histories, if these be conceived of as scrupulously "true" stories about the past. Historians like to restrict themselves to what <u>demonstrably</u> happened; they therefore depend heavily on surviving evidence. Reconstruction of actual dialogue without concrete evidence, for example, is not generally acceptable. But within such limits, history can serve some of the same functions of socialisation, education and inspiration as can myths and legends, which are not expected to have the same literal kind of truth about them. "Primarily history is always a story,"[1] for historical work is always intended for some sort of audience, immediate or future, captive or willing. The story is the framework of form and meaning the historian gives to a selection of data or facts. No more than any other kinds of facts can historical facts "speak for them-

selves." Outside the context of some kind of story, the truth or significance of historical data cannot be clear. Books, articles, lectures and broadcasts are all legitimate vehicles for "true stories about the past" in use today.

There are many possible motives for conceiving of such a thing as history, and for interesting oneself in it. One, "somewhat more simian and much less uplifting"[2] than most reasons given, is simply satisfaction of curiosity, the historian's own and that of his audience. The desire for immortalisation, in the sense of remembering and being remembered, has moved many to conceive of and interest themselves in history, to preserve the memory of certain elements of the past, and to contribute to the image posterity might have of them. Akin to this motive is the wish to attain a kind of transcendence, in the sense of feeling oneself part of a larger whole, of "participating in a world beyond the changes and chances of one's own immediate environment."[3] The quest for self-realisation could be called a separate reason, though perhaps it is really only an amalgam of all possible reasons for studying history.

> We are mostly what our past has made possible for us. Surely understanding what others have done is the best way for us to come most fully to terms with our own situations: not only in analysis or criticism but in a deeper and fuller understanding of what we can and cannot be.[4]

To be sure, history is not the only means to any of these

ends--science and art are two obvious others--but it is none the less a valid one among many.

Man is as likely to look to his past as he is to look around him, for, "as there is no knowledge of the past that is unconditioned by hope or fear for the future, so there is no knowledge of the future that is not based on past experience."[5] People pursue history, when they do so, in an attempt to know their world and to orient themselves in it as active and reflective beings. The kind of knowledge and orientation they seek thereby is similar to the kind they seek, through senses and intellect, of their present surroundings. Except that the questions asked are not "what is?" or "what is happening?" but "what was?" and "what happened?" The past, needless to say, is less immediately and fully ready to hand than the present; it is only indirectly available through surviving evidence, the historian's "sources". But one can be less apologetic about history's insufficiency as a total reflection of past reality, when one considers how very limited and selective is our perception of present reality; how much a matter of convention, or even collusion, it is.[6]

History, then, is what has been made or can be made of "the memorials the past has left us."[7] It is studied for reasons and presented in ways such as have been suggested in the preceding paragraphs. History is man's perception of the past, which is quite a relative

and changeable thing. It depends in part on the legacy the past leaves him, in part on the sense he can or will make of it, given his particular point of view.

> The fact that all historical research is based on memory and that memories are notoriously fallible and selective has greatly affected the way in which the field has developed. This has often been quite correctly considered a serious drawback. The evidence is too often full of gaps. Most historians would give a good deal to have had the chance of being actually present at some of the events they have described. This being impossible, it is necessary to use what analytical powers we possess to fill the gaps, here and now--and from our own point of view, not someone else's. Thus we are not scientists but still, like our predecessors for three thousand years, tellers of true stories. We narrate as analytically as the nature of the available evidence and our own lived experience allow us to. But the analysis is not univocal or, usually, enduring: models of what a past experience was like from a present point of view can, in the nature of things, very seldom last longer than a generation.[8]

In thus summing up what history is, and what the historian's predicament, the above passage makes reference to some of the basic problems of historical sources and their use. These are a central concern of this paper, particularly as they relate to oral sources.

Many factors determine "the nature of the available evidence." First there is the matter of physical survival: some events make physically lasting impressions, others do not. Most words and deeds vanish into thin air, or are at best imprinted in memories and traditions where they may or may not endure long and stably. Written words (except in sand), drawings, sculptures, buildings, implements--these are at least more likely to last a

considerable time in their original form, if accident or intent permit them to. Intent and effort to preserve evidence is an important factor. Formal oral tradition, for instance, defies the ephemeral nature of spoken words and other deeds otherwise unrecorded, by preserving the memory of them. While on the other hand, supposedly durable evidence can perish, either through neglect or through overuse.) Generally, though,

> every record of the past kept in a society was maintained because certain persons at that time and place considered the recorded activity more important than other activities that went unrecorded; certain deeds, ideals, institutions ought to be preserved for posterity.[9]

Surviving evidence therefore has a high component of what was wished on the future by the past. Especially with regard to those sources consciously created for historical or like purposes, it is worth while keeping in mind just how much they are products of the memories and perceptions, "notoriously fallible and selective," of their creators.

And beyond these considerations of what kinds of historical evidence may survive, and how, there is always another factor in the equation: "the nature of . . . [the historian's] own lived experience." This will have a profound influence, first, on what he perceives to be relevant evidence on any subject he cares to study; and after that, on what he makes of that evidence.

Whatever the truths, understandings, identifications, or entertainments sought through history, they

could be found equally well in images of either the remote or the recent past, and in the pasts of either familiar or exotic peoples. Some concept of and interest in history has been evident off and on in many different cultures and ages. The concept of "true stories of the remoter past," however, is neither ancient nor universal. A college textbook on western civilisation states the case as follows:

> It is certainly true that we live in a historical age, that is, in a period when history is rated high and when much time and effort are devoted to the furtherance of historical knowledge. Yet, strange as it may seem, this habit of thinking in historical terms, this "historical-mindedness" and this systematic pursuit of knowledge of the past, is relatively recent, dating back less than two centuries. Early ages appear to have been quite content with myth and legend as explanations of their past. The same might be said of the Greeks and the Romans; the first great historians, Herodotus and Thucydides, who did so much to record the doings of men rather than of gods, treated of their own time in a critical way but had little interest and no competence in reviewing the past.[10]

Indeed such a sweeping "historical-mindedness" was only made possible by the accumulation of source material on the more distant past. Primarily this meant the accumulation, either haphazard or carefully fostered, of written documents, a process vastly compounded with the advent of printing, and the habit of systematic record-keeping. Not all civilisations produce, preserve or value such materials, but the one with which we identify has done so on a large scale. Paradoxically, these developments which enabled a longer view of history have so engrossed us as to result in a narrowing or warping of our view of what

history is, and what constitutes proper historical evidence.

> For, despite Thucydides, contemporary history has held a precarious status in the annals of historiography. As men like Thucydides began to fix a present and thereby create a "past," it was this "past" which people increasingly identified as "history." The tendency to regard what was more remote as by definition more "historical" increased over the next two thousand years, despite the occasional Guicciardinis, Davilas, de Thous, and Clarendons, who had the audacity to imitate Thucydides and write about their own times; and this tendency was finally institutionalized with the professionalization of history in the nineteenth century. German scholarship, in consolidating both its methodological triumphs and its concept of historians as a separate caste, strengthened the wall between the past, which was considered the estate of serious historians, and the present, which was left to a disorderly straggle of memoirists and journalists.[11]

But despite the intermittence of its prestige, contemporary history--the "true story of the recent past"--has been the longest-standing, most widespread and consistent form of historical interest. No doubt the universal availability of appropriate source material has much to do with this. There are profound similarities, over time and from place to place, in the motives for engaging in contemporary history, the forms for presenting it, the sources used. Indeed these similarities are far more striking than any "progressive" or evolutionary trends one might possibly discern in a survey of contemporary histories from long ago to today.

The recently conventional view of history and of "proper" historical sources might well be caricatured as an interest primarily in subjects well sunk in the past,

and well attested to by written documents. But the written record, and the concepts of history, historian and historical source it bred, have begun to lose some of their hold over certain people among us who nonetheless profess a serious interest in history. This is due partly to the current realisation of how many significant aspects of our own lives (and by inference those of others past and present) are not represented in written documents, however central may be the role of the printed and written word in those lives.[12] The written record never could answer to all the needs of contemporary history, an interest in which is reviving, even to the extent of the field's becoming academically respectable.[13] Nor does the written record answer very satisfyingly to our interest in the histories of peoples of different cultural traditions, nor of what might be called the non-literate elements of our own society.[14] So historians count, dig, psychologise, . . . and listen; they seek different sources, and they use written sources differently. One result of following through on these realisations and interests is bound to be a broadening of the recently conventional, narrowly conceived notions about history, historians and historical sources. And this broadening could as easily mean enrichment as debasement of these concepts.

In this chapter some comments have been made about the nature and validity of historical studies in

general. The discussion of oral sources in particular, and how they have been, are being and might be used in historical studies, which is the substance of the following chapters, has proceeded with these comments in mind. Studies of the recent past or contemporary history, rather than of the remoter past or of history in general, receive more attention, for this is the realm of historical studies that the spoken word serves most fully and directly. In line with what was said above about there being much that is constant in contemporary history whenever or wherever it has been undertaken, the emphasis in the chapter immediately following is upon what has long been known, however often the knowledge may have to be rediscovered, about oral sources, their gathering, interpretation and use.

NOTES TO CHAPTER II

1 Tillinghast, Specious Past, p. 6.

2 Ibid., p. 12.

3 Ibid., p. 136.

4 Ibid., p. 178.

5 Loc. cit.

6 This matter of differing constructions or descriptions of reality is a main theme in a recently popular series of books by Carlos Castaneda: The Teachings of Don Juan: a Yaqui Way of Knowledge, New York, Ballantine Books, 1968; A Separate Reality: Further Conversations with Don Juan, New York, Simon & Schuster, 1971; Journey to Ixtlan: the Lessons of Don Juan, New York, Simon & Schuster, 1972; and Tales of Power, New York, Simon & Schuster, 1974.

7 Tillinghast, Specious Past, p. 172.

8 Ibid., p. 171.

9 Ibid., p. 6.

10 William L. Langer, ed., Western Civilization, New York, American Heritage/Harper & Row, 1968, vol. 1, Paleolithic Man to the Emergence of European Powers, pp. 10-11.

11 Schlesinger, "Contemporary History," p. 69.

12 Ibid., pp. 70, 73.

13 Ibid., p. 69.

14 Some instances of this kind of interest, and discussions on how to pursue it effectively are: the symposium "Oral History in Africa," African Studies Bulletin, vol. 8 (September 1965), pp. 1-23 (hereafter cited as: "Oral History in Africa"); and Anthony D. Fisher, "Some Considerations in Writing the History of Western Canada's Indians," rough draft of a paper prepared for presentation to the Canadian Historical Association, Toronto, 7 June 1974, 15pp. (hereafter cited as: Fisher, "Western Canada's Indians"). Another consideration of the issue especially as it relates to western Canada is to be found in Proceedings of a Conference on Tape Recording Held in the Provincial Museum and Archives of Alberta, Edmonton, Monday 24th April 1972, pp. 19-24: report of a paper given

by Professor Lewis H. Thomas, "The Historian's Need: Oral History and What Should Be Recorded" (hereafter cited as: Thomas, "Historians and Oral History"), including a chart showing a "'Scale of Value of Oral History in Relation to the Availability of Written Records' . . . .

"The graph is designed to draw attention to subjects of historical investigation which are favoured by present-day historians. These subjects are arranged on a scale which indicates the relative availability of written records for each subject, and hence the utility of oral evidence is indicated. Theoretically zero . . . might be regarded as applying to a subject where the written evidence is complete and adequate; similarly, 10 stands for a subject for which no documentary evidence exists. In the latter instance, many variations in the importance of a particular subject or event will be present." (p. 22.) See APPENDIX I for a version of this chart.

# CHAPTER III

## CONTEMPORARY HISTORY AND ORAL SOURCES

This chapter concerns itself mainly with precedents, ancient and modern, that have been cited in recent discussions about the use of oral sources for history. Some are illustrious names guaranteed to call any conventional historian or patriot, as the case may be, to attention. And not just in the hope of gaining instant respect or reflected glory have they been mentioned, though for that too no doubt. All are illustrative of just how long and how well oral sources have been understood and appreciated as historical evidence. Each case points up one or more of the enduring truths about oral sources, about their value, about the problems associated with them. It is the intention here to draw out some of these.

Thucydides of Athens (late fifth century B.C.) is a frequently cited precedent in all sorts of discussions about historical thought and methods. His concept of history and approach to historical evidence were very like the modern ones. "We know very little about him, save that he was a general in involuntary retirement, but

his writing shows that he was cultivated, skeptical and austere."[1] He wrote of a series of events which he thought to be important and instructive for contemporaries and posterity to know about and reflect on:

> Despite the known disposition of the actors in a struggle to overrate its importance, and when it is over to return to their admiration of earlier events, yet an examination of the facts will show that [the Peloponnesian War] was much greater than the wars which preceded it.
>
> . . . The absence of any romance in my history will, I fear, detract somewhat from its interest; but if it be judged useful by those inquirers who desire an exact knowledge of the past as an aid to the interpretation of the future, which in the course of human things must resemble if it does not reflect it, I shall be content. In fine, I have written my work, not as an essay which is to win the applause of the moment, but as a possession for all time.[2]

Thucydides' History of the Peloponnesian War

> was limited to a severely factual account of a particular series of events he either had been able to witness himself or had questioned other eye-witnesses about. . . .
>
> Thucydides believed that it was essential to gain a true perspective of the Peloponnesian War, the greatest, and saddest, event in Athenian history up to his time. By "true" he means "corresponding to the observed facts of everyday experience," and excluding other kinds of facts, such as gods, fates, and portents.[3]

Essentially he wrote on human affairs which he saw as intrinsically interesting and important, and that furthermore were not yet "out of the reach of evidence."[4] It is understandable, given his purposes and the climate of his times, that Thucydides would shun all evidence tainted with "poetry, drama and legend"; that he would find contemporary evidence the most trustworthy. Later historians have not necessarily shared this prejudice; ever since

the days of the first "demythologizers" at least, they have happily or grimly gone about winnowing the historical out of such tainted sources.[5]

Speeches had such a large part in the life of Periclean Athens that it is not surprising they are rendered in quasi-verbatim form in Thucydides' History.

> With reference to the speeches in this history, some were delivered before the war began, others while it was going on; some I heard myself, others I got from various quarters; it was in all cases difficult to carry them word for word in one's memory, so my habit has been to make the speakers say what was in my opinion demanded of them by the various occasions, of course adhering as closely as possible to the general sense of what they really said.[6]

Rather than be shocked at the sort of licence that this approach permitted him, one might note that we still do essentially the same whenever we quote someone, or even just report on something, "from memory".

> And with reference to the narrative of events, far from permitting myself to derive it from the first source that came to hand, I did not even trust my own impressions, but it rests partly on what I saw myself, partly on what others saw for me, the accuracy of the report being always tried by the most severe and detailed tests possible.

To which he added that:

> My conclusions have cost me some labour from the want of coincidence between accounts of the same occurrences by different eyewitnesses, arising sometimes from imperfect memory, sometimes from undue partiality for one side or the other.[7]

Thus Thucydides on his approach to and handling of his sources; on the recording of evidence, on its reliability and biases. A fine example of one not of our time, but

by no means alien or primitive in either his perceptive or critical faculties.

Thucydides engaged to one degree or another in all aspects of "history making": contribution, collection, preservation and interpretation of evidence. To be sure, the only "preservation" he accomplished was through the History itself; his account is the record of the events he describes, or to put it another way, of the evidence available to him. Whatever else he may have been, Thucydides was not an archivist, a preserver of "documents" themselves, spoken or otherwise. This archival aspect of historical work is today often, and with good reason most of the time, considered an important element in the proper use of oral sources for history.[8] The "ancient method of simply reporting unstructured conversations," which presumably was Herodotus' and Thucydides' approach, could be seen as lacking this important element which there is no longer any excuse for omitting, what with the availability of "modern technological devices to preserve the spoken interview."[9] The point should perhaps be made here, sooner rather than later, that the "ancient method" has never been entirely superseded, nor is it ever likely to be. However admirable is the ideal of documenting every word as spoken, the ideal is not always practicable, nor, if practicable, is it always appropriate.

Lyman Copeland Draper (1815-1891) is an example of those whose emphasis was almost entirely on this

archival aspect of historical work. He played a large role in developing the collection of material in the library of the Wisconsin State Historical Society; "Frederick Jackson Turner used this collection heavily in developing his theory of the frontier." Draper is cited in discussions on the use of oral sources for history for "pioneering a historical method of great potential value."[10]

His task he characterised as a "pious--and I might add--thankless labor of rescuing from forgetfulness and neglect the memories of an interesting band of worthies." He carried on correspondence and interviews on subjects of American history that interested him, on grounds that "very much historical incident must still be treasured up in the memories of aged Western Pioneers, which would perish with them if not quickly rescued."[11] Draper was interested in amassing historical data, and whether he got it through written correspondence or through visits and interviews was immaterial. He resorted to the latter means only because of difficulties with the former: misunderstandings, the disinclination of his subjects to write, and so forth. But he evidently used both means to the utmost: in his first year as Corresponding Secretary of the Wisconsin State Historical Society, 1854-55, he wrote almost two thousand letters; and by 1887 he "had traveled some 60,000 miles in search of historical truth."[12] The records he made of his interviews are

detailed enough for it to be apparent from them how much he prepared in advance for these interviews; also "how he elicited specific information by asking specific questions, and how he took 'with grains of allowance' some of the things his informants told him."[13] He sought corroborative and supplementary documents concerning the testimony given him. He obtained both testimony and documents by appealing to people's sense of responsibility to save their ancestors from oblivion, and by promising to use whatever material was given him in his forthcoming books. Time-honoured collectors' and researchers' tactics, these! No doubt Draper's promise was sincere: he was driven to such prodigious research by the desire to assure the accuracy of the histories he would write; but he ultimately managed to produce only one.[14] Collecting was his lifelong preoccupation, though some of his time and energy had always to be diverted to cultivating the patrons and collaborators he needed to finance and further his projects.[15] Work of this sort, on any scale at all, has never ceased to be rather time-consuming and expensive.

Draper was a researcher and archivist par excellence, a gatherer, not an interpreter of "facts" or a synthesiser of narratives. Though he was motivated by a quest for historical data, "the mass of his accumulated facts overwhelmed him. Nor could he interpret his characters; in his eyes they were all heroes to whom honor was due."[16] If this attitude caused him problems

in the "final production" stage of historical work, it nonetheless meant that he regarded all of his interview subjects as unique sources, all of them "important" in terms of what they could tell him, if not necessarily in terms of their station in life. A little of this attitude --not exactly hero worship, but certainly a regard for individual uniqueness and worth--is implied in any inquirer's resorting to personal interviews, particularly those that go beyond the survey or oral questionnaire level, to give the subjects "special, non-standardized treatment."[17] And this is precisely what the historian must often do in order to elicit information of historical interest, about "what was" and "what happened".[18]

Draper's methods and his outlook, the problems he faced, and the ways in which he handled them, all foreshadow those of today's contemporary historians and "oral historians", particularly those who, like he was, are serious but small-scale or individual operators. Even as his efforts were more or less stalled at the collecting stage, so too are the efforts of many today.[19]

Hubert Howe Bancroft (1832-1918) is perhaps a better known and more widely cited example.[20] In his involvement with oral sources, gathering and using them, one might say he was his <u>own</u> "patron": he solved the perennial problem of financing such a venture by making his fortune first! Bancroft was an entrepreneur, and a librarian and collector as well as a historian, whose base

of operations from the middle of the nineteenth century on was San Francisco, California.[21] His emphasis was on the organisation and publication of knowledge, and he operated on a large scale. He travelled widely in search of material on the Pacific coast region of all North America, and he employed a large staff of assistants in collecting documents and testimony. He was as patient and painstaking as his priorities would allow.[22]

> He had his assistants interview a host of old-timers in the 1880's--'49-ers, men who'd built the Central Pacific, and so on. His interviewers took shorthand, and their transcripts were deposited in the Bancroft Library . . . .[23]

In this, Bancroft showed two concerns that are very current today: to preserve "more or less verbatim" the oral testimony he obtained, and to make it available to other researchers as well as using it in his own works.[24]

He was initially criticised for his "factory methods", and for the local or regional emphasis of his work. "His reputation became better later, largely because of the change of emphasis in historical research in the United States and because of his historical collection."[25] A wide variety of ventures in contemporary history and oral history can and do identify with Bancroft, either in terms of the large scale of projects they undertake (particularly those with institutional backing), or more often, in terms of the spirit of their work (energetic and ambitious), and the focus of their interest (regional), and the problems they face in obtaining and

evaluating historical evidence (expense, contradictions).

Marius Barbeau (1883- ) has recently been cited as a Canadian pioneer in the gathering and use of oral sources.[26] He began what turned out to be a long and distinguished career with the National Museum in 1911, as an anthropologist in the Museum Branch of the Geological Survey of Canada. He is most noted for his collection and publication of Indian and French-Canadian folklore and folk music, though it was for some interviews he did with the painter Emily Carr that Barbeau's name came up in a discussion of oral sources for historical use. His work involved collecting, publishing and commentary of many kinds, and taken as a whole its emphasis is more broadly cultural than, say, strictly anthropological or historical.[27] This pioneer is already so latter-day that, in the later stages of his career at least, he had access to sound-recording technology. The government was, so to speak, Barbeau's "patron". It continues in this role, directly or indirectly, for the overwhelming majority of research projects today involving oral sources, not to mention all other kinds of research, individual or institutional, in Canada.

The above examples may be taken as isolated instances, which is really all they are; or they may be thought of as part of some kind of "tradition", an artificial view in this case but possibly useful to some. Either way they show something of the long record and many

dimensions of active interest in contemporary history, or at least in contemporary historical materials; of the seeking for and preservation and interpretation of oral as well as other evidence of the past, for the present and/or future.

Whether anyone will undertake such work at any given time and place, and whether the emphasis of that work will be more on collection and preservation or on publication and interpretation, will depend largely on "felt needs" and available resources in that time and place. Given the proper interest and resources, the most urgent task may be seen to be the saving of historical evidence from oblivion; or it may be the task of informing one's contemporaries about the recent past; or it may be some combination of these. A realisation of the transience of evidence of the past has motivated most of the collecting and preservation that has ever gone on; a desire to teach or inform has motivated most of the interpretation or commentary, historical or otherwise. One can see both concerns operating, in varying proportions, in all the examples cited above.

And both seem to be strong motives for gathering and using oral sources today, when the age-old reasons for doing so appear to have been supplemented by some new reasons, mostly having to do with twentieth-century technology:

> Future scholars delving into our own era will confront enormous masses of material in almost

> every field: it is a familiar plaint that paper work seems to increase in geometric proportion to the complexity of civilization. But very little of the paper that survives will be of the kind labeled "Personal and Confidential," the kind scholars in the past have found indispensable to understanding the rest. What has become of the confidential letter? It has been replaced by the telephone call, or, in this mobile age, by face-to-face conference. (Witness the constant use of "contact" as a verb!) The diarist, too, is disappearing amid the manifold distractions of modern life.[28]

The prominent American historian Allan Nevins, concerned both that a heritage would be irretrievably lost, and that his contemporaries had little knowledge of that heritage, observed in the 1930's that:

> Once historical study in America was tremendously alive. If it were as alive today as it should be, we would have in this country two enterprises that do not exist. We would have a popular historical magazine . . . We would also have some organization which made a systematic attempt to obtain, from the lips and papers of living Americans who have led significant lives, a fuller record of their participation in the political, economic, and cultural life of the last sixty years . . .[29]

By the 1950's, Nevins himself had started two "enterprises" to remedy the situation: one was the "popular historical magazine" American Heritage; the other was the Oral History Research Office at Columbia University. The idea of the latter was "to accumulate by careful interviews a collection of intimate memoirs that would not otherwise exist,"[30] and this "continuously, and on the broadest possible scale, for the benefit of scholars generally."[31] The Oral History Research Office developed through the 1950's and 1960's to become par excellence the "organization" Nevins had envisioned. Several institu-

tions and individuals have closely followed the Columbia example; many more have adapted the "oral history" idea more or less drastically to suit their various means and purposes.

The magnetic wire/tape recorder, which was just beginning to become widely available, was brought into the Columbia oral history project shortly after it got under way. (Note that the device was therefore "not originally essential to the definition"[32] of the term "oral history".) It performed a stenographic function, i.e. obtained a verbatim record of the project's interviews, more fully and at less expense, and perhaps less obtrusively, than could either a note-taking interviewer-historian or a live stenographer. "The tape recorder became an integral part of the [Columbia] operation, greatly expanding the scope of the work being done there."[33] Its apparent efficacy was such that subsequent oral history projects have incorporated it into their schemes from the very outset.

All this has resulted in the preservation of evidence that would otherwise not survive, the creation of records that would otherwise not exist. These source materials and the techniques for gathering them are both called "oral history". They will be described in detail below, in chapter VI. They are useful tools for both the gatherer and the interpreter of contemporary historical evidence, the archivist and the historian, in their particular campaigns against oblivion and oblivious-

ness. Paradoxically, modern technology has shown itself capable on the one hand of confounding such efforts and on the other of facilitating them. Chapter IV considers in more detail this matter of the implications of modern technology for the use of oral sources in historical studies.

NOTES TO CHAPTER III

1 Pardon E. Tillinghast, Approaches to History: Selections in the Philosophy of History from the Greeks to Hegel, Englewood Cliffs, N.J., Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1968 (hereafter cited as: Tillinghast, Approaches), p. 3.

2 Thucydides, in M. I. Finley, "History of the Peloponnesian War," The Greek Historians, New York, The Viking Press, Inc., 1959, pp. 218-19, 230-31, cited in Tillinghast, Approaches, pp. 12-13.

3 Tillinghast, Approaches, p. 3.

4 Thucydides, cited in Tillinghast, Approaches, p. 12.

5 "Demythologizing" is a certain kind of Biblical criticism dating back at least to the eighteenth century (see "The Bible: the Believers Gain," Time (Canada Edition), vol. 104, no. 21 (18 November 1974), pp. 36-43).

6 Thucydides, cited in Tillinghast, Approaches, p. 13.

7 Loc. cit.

8 Philip D. Curtin, "Field Techniques for Collecting and Processing Oral Data," Journal of African History, vol. 9, no. 3 (1968) (hereafter cited as: Curtin, "Collecting Oral Data"), p. 369. See APPENDIX II for an extended excerpt from this article.

9 Charles W. Conaway, "Lyman Copeland Draper, 'Father of American Oral History'," Journal of Library History, vol. 1, no. 4 (1966) (hereafter cited as: Conaway, "L. C. Draper"), p. 234.

10 Ibid., p. 241.

11 Draper, in William B. Hesseltine, Pioneer's Mission: the Story of Lyman C. Draper, Madison, The State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1954, pp. 28 and 27 respectively, cited in Conaway, "L. C. Draper," p. 241.

12 Conaway, "L. C. Draper," p. 238.

13 Ibid., pp. 239-40.

14 Ibid., pp. 235, 238.

15 Ibid., pp. 238-40.

16 Ibid., p. 241.

17 Lewis Anthony Dexter, Elite and Specialized Interviewing, Evanston, Ill., Northwestern University Press, 1970 (hereafter cited as: Dexter, Interviewing), p. 5. Such a regard for the individual in history is certainly evident in the work of the "inventor" of oral history, Allan Nevins. A list of the biographies and histories he wrote is given on p. 3 of the revised edition (1962) of his book The Gateway to History, Garden City, N.Y., Anchor Books, Doubleday & Company, Inc.; and that book is itself a statement of Nevins' attitude and approach to history.

18 "The worker whose views on politics or morality can be handled satisfactorily enough by a standardized, survey interview may have taken part in the early days of forming a national trade union, and the oral historian who talks with him about this experience is well advised to give him the VIP treatment, that is to give him broad leeway in structuring his recollections of the situation and in recording what he regards as relevant." (Dexter, Interviewing, p. 7.)

19 "stalled" only in the sense of failing to achieve intended objectives. Archive-creating (which is what work of this kind amounts to) is quite as important as, though not the same thing as, the production of historical works. It can even be thought of as a form of publication, if that makes the collector feel better about it (see Vaughn D. Bornet, "Oral History Can Be Worthwhile," American Archivist, vol. 18 (July 1955), p. 252; and Curtin, "Collecting Oral Data," p. 371).

20 To mention three widely separated instances: Willa Klug Baum, "Oral History: a Revived Tradition at the Bancroft Library," Pacific Northwest Quarterly, vol. 58 (April 1967), pp. 57-64 (hereafter cited as: Baum, "A Revived Tradition"); Louis M. Starr, "History, Warm," Columbia University Forum, vol. 5, no. 2 (1962), p. 30; and Thomas, "Historians and Oral History," p. 21. Bancroft's dates from Dwight W. Hoover, "H. H. Bancroft," The McGraw-Hill Encyclopedia of World Biography, New York, 1973, vol. 1 (hereafter cited as: Hoover, "Bancroft"), p. 371.

21 The Works of Hubert Howe Bancroft, first published 1883-86, run to 39 vols.; they comprise a very broadly conceived history of the Pacific coast region of North America. Bancroft sold his rather considerable library of books and manuscripts to the University of California in 1905 (see Hoover, "Bancroft," p. 372).

22 Hubert Howe Bancroft, Literary Industries: a Memoir, New York, Harper & Brothers, 1891. See especially Chapter XXII, "My Methods of Writing History." The tales he tells

throughout the book are quite like those any collector, archivist, or oral historian engaged in similar work today might have to tell. A foray into British Columbia is described in Chapter XX, "Explorations Northward."

23 Starr, "History; Warm," p. 30.

24 Baum, "A Revived Tradition," p. 57.

25 Hoover, "Bancroft," p. 372.

26 Leo La Clare, head of the Historical Sound Recordings Division, Public Archives of Canada, "Directions in Canadian Aural/Oral History," an address to the Canadian Aural/Oral History Conference, Simon Fraser University, 18 October 1974 (unless otherwise indicated, references to the proceedings of this conference are from my own notes and recollections; there is a published account of these proceedings in Sound Heritage, vol. 4, no. 1 (1975).).

27 Norah Story, "Barbeau, Marius," The Oxford Companion to Canadian History and Literature, Toronto, Oxford University Press, 1967, pp. 49-50. Titles and descriptions of some of his publications are given in this article.

28 Louis M. Starr, "Columbia's Reservoir of Source Materials," Columbia University Graduate Faculties Newsletter, November 1959 (hereafter cited as: Starr, "Columbia's Reservoir"), p. 2.

29 From the preface to Nevins' Gateway to History (1938), as cited in Starr, "Columbia's Reservoir," p. 1. Career data on Nevins in "Nevins, Prof. Allan," Directory of American Scholars, vol. 1, History, New York, Jaques Cattel/R. R. Bowker Co., 5th ed., 1969, p. 374; updated from Oral History Association Newsletter, vol. 5, no. 2 (1971): headline "Allan Nevins, Honorary Chairman of OHA, Dies at 80," and tribute "Some Thoughts on Allan Nevins," by Louis M. Starr, pp. 1, 11.

30 Starr, "Columbia's Reservoir," p. 1.

31 Starr, "History, Warm," p. 30.

32 Donald J. Schippers, "The Literature of Oral History," in Louis M. Starr, ed., The Second National Colloquium on Oral History, New York, Oral History Association, Inc., 1968 (hereafter cited as: Colloq II), p. 35.

33 Loc. cit.

## CHAPTER IV

## MODERN TECHNOLOGY AND ORAL SOURCES

Modern technology, with its manifold implications for everyday life and for the historical record, has much to do with the breadth and depth of the present concern for contemporary history and historical evidence among historians and general public alike.

Contemporary historians today feel a particularly strong sense of responsibility to keep the public informed about its recent past. The American historian Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr. explains well, if a little hyperbolically, this sense of responsibility and whence it arises:

> What we perceive as the "past" . . . is chronologically much closer to us than it was when change was a function, not of days, but of decades.
>
> Along with the acceleration of history has come the intensification of the means and volume of communication. This has meant the unceasing bombardment of the individual by signals of growing strength and significance; and, along with the side effects of stimulation and suffocation, this has vastly heightened the felt sense of the urgency of events. Nor is this urgency an illusion of the electronic age. For the scientific ingenuity which in our time has blessed humanity with the capacity to destroy itself has, in consequence, made the need to know more desperate than ever before. History, as a relevant form of knowledge, finds itself pressed into the service of crisis--hopefully less as a means of

> propaganda than as an effort at illumination. And the democratic need to know is accompanied by the constitutional right to know--the rights of the citizens of a democracy to have all possible information, favorable or not, regarding the character of public problems and the motives and effects of public policy. So the contemporary historian, when he faithfully discharges his task, serves not only his old cause of historic truth but his nation's cause of democratic responsibility.[1]

Translated into broader terms, both the responsibility felt by politically oriented historians like Schlesinger, and the modern conditions that inspired their concern and complicated their task, are every bit as much a concern of other contemporary historians whose orientations may be otherwise: economic, social, cultural or whatever.[2] Nor are historians obliged to fulfil their responsibility to an unappreciative audience in this day and age, as the public is patently interested in contemporary history of many kinds and at many levels.

Modern travel and communications technologies have bred certain ways of carrying on the business of life, and undermined others, with consequent effects on both the quantity and kind of records which the lives of this age will produce. One might look, for a start, at the rather more restricted area that has traditionally preoccupied historians, an area which might well be called the "life of business" (political, and perhaps economic), and consider what has happened to ways and means and records there:

> In the last three quarters of a century, the rise of the typewriter has vastly increased the flow

> of paper, while the rise of the telephone has vastly reduced its importance.[3]

On the one hand, more documentation can be produced; but on the other, more business of a non-self-documenting nature can take place. So future historians may find an impoverished written record to work with. Contemporary historians may find that record not immediately or fully open to them. Or if the files are to be open to researchers early or immediately, and there is more and more pressure for this to happen, the knowledge that it will or might happen can have peculiar effects on what is entered into--and left out of--the written record.[4] And of course unrecorded words and deeds are no more directly available to contemporary than to future historical inquirers; but at least the "sayers" and "doers" may be alive for a time to answer questions about their activities.

> This combination of factors has created the technical need to supplement documents if we seek to recover the full historical transaction. So the contemporary historian acquires an indispensable function, if only to improve the record for the historian of the future. How can he best discharge this task? The interview is one obvious device, a method facilitated in our time by the invention of the electronic tape.[5]

And certainly this approach is immediately useful to the contemporary historians themselves in acquiring material to interpret and publish, to accomplish their mission as "tellers of true stories about the recent past."

The argument that written documentation is less competent as a source now than it once was should not,

however, be carried too far. Reticence or discretion, if not baser motives, must always be assumed to have kept many written communications--even the most personal and confidential ones--from "telling all" or telling "the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth." Nor will recourse to personal interviews necessarily overcome that difficulty, as the same restraints will prevail over oral testimony, promises of confidentiality notwithstanding.[6] It should not in any case be thought of as the answer; it is an available option, of course, and to avoid it entirely because it is not perfect would be to give in to defeatism or obscurantism.[7] If there is disagreement about the relative competence of modern written documentation, there is none about its unwieldy size. And the interview has been proposed as one way to obtain guidance in the mastery and use of that vast body of evidence.[8] Whether, when all the returns are in, today's written record proves worse or just no better than it ever was, any guidance obtained through interviews with people who know that record because they produced it--and such guidance may only be got through interviews--will be useful to historians trying to cope with modern documentation.

But the "life-of-business" angle on history is not the only one currently commanding the attention and interest of either historians or their audience. Modern technology could hardly have inspired changes in the ways

of carrying on the business of life for all those whose lives it touches, without inspiring changes as well in their ways of perceiving the world. The new more sweeping awareness of surroundings, events and changes (a feeling of being in a "global village"?) is reflected in historical studies.[9] Again Arthur Schlesinger's hyperbole helps to illustrate the point in part:

> Our age, for whatever reason--perhaps again because the rapidity of change makes it so hard for us to take ourselves or our society for granted--has an unprecedented preoccupation with itself, its dilemmas, its agonies, its ecstasies. This propensity to self-examination, nurtured by competition among the organs, linear or electronic, of mass journalism, leads on to a morbid and often sick appetite for inside stories, sensational speculation, and prurient gossip. This has enlarged the market for contemporary history . . . .[10]

Their "propensity to self-examination," combined with their sense of living in a "small world", make the public receptive to, among other things, all manner of true stories about the recent past. These include not only the sort of "inside stories" Schlesinger emphasises here, but a whole variety of perspectives on local and regional subjects as well as national and exotic ones; on "ordinary" as well as "great" people; on non-literate as well as literate peoples or groups.

Historians researching these subjects must frequently resort to non-written sources for information, either in addition to, or despite, the abundance of written and printed prose and statistical materials available. Observations of material culture (sort of an exer-

cise in contemporary archaeology?), and collections of oral testimony (traditions, reminiscences) can be the basis for credible historical works on subjects in areas where written sources have recently become inadequate, or, more likely the case, where they have never been adequate.[11] The raw data gathered for such projects can, if properly recorded, serve as archives for other researchers: "Later historians can refer to the original material, reassess it, come to new conclusions, or use it to answer new questions."[12] Such archive-building should perhaps be encouraged not only because, as one hears it said on all sides, nothing stays the same for long these days, but also to avoid the manifold evils of what might be called "spoiling the field by over-cultivating it."[13]

If by means of modern travel and communications technologies we can personally contact a wider range of people, and can project sight and sound images and receive them from great distances, we can also, by means of modern recording technology, project such images into the future or, considering the recordings already in existence, call such images up from the past. (The term "images" is used here advisedly: let it never be thought that recording devices capture the "totality" of anything; the camera or the microphone, like the human eye or ear--in short the recording device like the human witness--has its perceptual biases and limits.) An unprecedented amount of activity of a non-self-documenting nature may go on in the

twentieth century, but at the same time we have the unprecedented possibility of "audible documents". Many kinds of sound documents can be and are being produced. Perhaps there is even too much of a mania for recording the audible now, and what is worth keeping will have to be selected and stored, in a process similar to that for managing modern paperwork, the rest to be methodically destroyed or left to perish or survive unprotected. But such was not always the case. Technologies in general take some time to become sufficiently refined, and widely known and used, so that both their potential benefits and their drawbacks will be realised. Sound recording technology is no exception. Many are the individuals and institutions who for years created historically valuable "audible documents" and scrapped them after their immediate use as broadcast material or mechanical stenographer was fulfilled, only to realise later that the sound document itself would have been worthwhile saving.[14]

Phono cylinders, discs and tapes have something of the stability and durability of written documents or artifacts. And with audible as with any other documents, information inheres in both their physical form and their contents, verbal or otherwise.[15] For instance, "the changes in the technology of sound recording equipment, materials, and techniques can be analyzed from the physical characteristics of the sound recordings."[16] So in the case of recorded speeches or interviews, this would

mean that the physical characteristics, the audible aspects, and the verbal content of these documents all have value as evidence. As regards their audible aspect:

> The recording of voices may enlarge the dimension of history generally by bringing to the historian new types of direct impressions of character, personality and manner. Inflection, accent, pace and rhythm of speech can tell much about a man, as well as sometimes being essential to a real understanding of the precise matter he is communicating at a moment. An experience with a man's voice and with his verbal reaction to the pressures of [the situation in which he is being recorded] can be a valuable addition to the total collection of factors through which we must come to judge him.[17]

Such recordings as these are reducible to print for convenience in scanning their content, but the audible dimension is of course lost in transcription. Then there are other sound documents which are not at all verbal in content, or not mainly so: music, sound tracks, sound effects, "soundscapes". The evidential value of these is even more closely bound up with their audible aspect.

Any of the various sound documents produced can be preserved and used for historical purposes. The various kinds of audible documents contain information which may be compared to that contained in parallel types of written sources. They pose some of the same problems as written sources, and some problems peculiar to themselves, for the archivist or historian who would keep or use them. The remainder of this chapter will be taken up with enumerating some of the different kinds of sound documents now in existence, as compared with the different types of historical documents in general; also with dis-

cussing some of the peculiar features of sound documents, their virtues and problems as materials for the archivist to keep and the historian to use.

A useful classification of historical documents for this purpose is provided by Louis Gottschalk in part one of The Use of Personal Documents in History, Anthropology and Sociology (1945). The ranking is roughly according to usefulness for historical purposes, i.e. reliability, which depends on: 1) time-lapse between an event and the recording thereof; 2) intended purpose of the record, whether to order, to inform, to persuade, to entertain; 3) its degree of confidentiality; and 4) the expertness of the author of the record.[18] With most of Gottschalk's amplifications edited out, and a few of them paraphrased, the classification is as follows:

I. Contemporary Records.
   (1) instruction or command
   (2) stenographic or phonographic record
   (3) business and legal papers [e.g. last wills and testaments]
   (4) notebooks and memoranda

II. Confidential Reports.
   (1) military and diplomatic dispatches
   (2) journal or diary [unless actually memoirs set down later]
   (3) personal letters

III. Public Reports.
   (1) newspaper reports and dispatches; pamphlets [current-events-type]
   (2) memoirs and autobiographies
   (3) official histories

IV. Questionnaires.

V. Government Documents. [Statistics are often available only from this source. Neither the competence nor the responsibility of the authors of these documents is so easily determined as it

may be with other documents. "Many historians have altogether too respectful an attitude toward government documents; and this deference is shared by some political scientists and sociologists."]

(1) stenographic or phonographic records [of] proceedings of governmental bodies [beware of possible backdating, polishing, "insertions"]
(2) laws and regulations [which show what mattered to those who made them]

VI. Expressions of Opinion.
editorials, essays, speeches, pamphlets, letters to the editor

VII. Fiction, Song, Poetry, and Folklore.[19]

There is already some explicit reference to sound documents in this list, specifically "phonographic records", I(2), and V(1); but many of the other categories mentioned can represent oral or audible events of which audible as well as written records can be and increasingly are being made.

Keeping as closely as possible to the ordering of document types just given, there are, first of all, private or confidential oral transactions: face to face or telephone conversations or conferences of either a casual or business nature; also self-reminders spoken into a recording device. These latter are like written "notebooks and memoranda", I(4), and some people now make a "journal or diary", II(2), this way. The conversations and conferences can contain material in the nature of "instruction or command", I(1), or "personal letters", II(3), or anything in between. These transactions are all susceptible to being recorded--openly, unobtrusively, or downright secretly. Recording by means of "bugging" or

"wiretapping" is frowned upon if done unbeknownst to the "recordees", and for less than the most urgent reasons of national security, especially when the fact of such surveillance or the record itself is subsequently revealed. It is indeed possible that historians may be "thanking . . . for centuries to come" those who obtain and preserve such documents.[20] But it is also well to remember that knowledge or even suspicion of their being recorded can alter, even poison, the atmosphere of private or confidential oral transcations.

The various kinds of "public reports", III in the outline above, also have their counterparts among sound documents. Radio and television news broadcasts, for instance, are very like the newspaper versions; in fact they are often only oral readings from the same wire service dispatches which inform the newspapers. News programmes can be recorded in addition to, or instead of, being broadcast "live". However, such recordings are usually kept only temporarily for distribution purposes rather than permanently as archival material.[21] "Memoirs and autobiographies", III(2), can be spoken ("told", "dictated") as well as written. Both forms can be polished and published, or they may be intended mainly for research use, in which case they need be neither.[22] Gottschalk distinguished between "the type of memoirs with which the historian usually deals [polished-and-published, because these are the ones that have usually been available to him]

and the type of autobiography [obtained through interview] that frequently constitutes the chief personal document of the sociologist and psychologist." He further commented that:

> The living subject who narrates his autobiography under the eye or to the ear of the scientist, who is then able to cross-examine the narrator, who may thereupon supplement, correct, or confirm his original statements, rarely is available to the historian. Only historians who deal with relatively recent affairs may be that fortunate.[23]

While this will forever be the case, historians can at least use such memoirs or autobiographies as have been obtained through that process by other historians, and preserved as voice-recordings or in transcription or both; for the process and documents so described are in fact those of "oral history". Written "official histories", III(3), which are valuable because of the inside knowledge available to their producers, if suspect because of their frequently propagandist purpose,[24] can also have their audio-visual counterparts today.

"Questionnaires", category IV above, can be conducted orally, but whether there is any point preserving them as audible documents in part or in whole depends on the nature of the questionnaire. With those seeking standardised responses there is no reason whatsoever to do so, other than the always valid one of trapping the spoken word for linguists! With those in search of individualised, unconstrained, extensive answers there is certainly justification for doing so.[25] In a sense, any

interview is at least an informal "questionnaire".

Sound documents produced by governments in their official capacity would have to be judged on the same basis as would official documents in any other form (see cautions in V and V(1) above). These are not to be confused with sound documents produced unofficially by people in government office, which would come under categories previously mentioned.

The counterparts of written "expressions of opinion" (see VI above) are editorial broadcasts, and perhaps "documentaries", these being in a sense audio or audio-visual "essays".[26] Programmes of this nature are more often recorded than news broadcasts; indeed recording and splicing are often necessary steps in their production. It is also more usual for such programmes to be retained in archives than it is for news broadcasts.

Broadcast and commercial recordings of "fiction, song, poetry, and folklore", VII, are (all copies counted, anyway) the most numerous of sound documents currently available. Archival reserves of other kinds of sound documents are not likely soon to catch up with them, either in terms of quantity or of technical quality (as productions, if not necessarily as historical sources). They have the same value for historical purposes as any other "contemporary works of fiction, drama, and poetry"; that is, "they reveal the author's likes and dislikes, hopes and fears [and] they provide the historian with an

understanding of some of the local color, the environment, that helped to shape the author's views."[27] Of course recordings of actual events-as-they-happen can give this same kind of information in addition to the "hard" data they are primarily intended to provide about "what happened"; and plenty of this sort of recording goes on, professionally and otherwise.[28]

Sound documents, as any others, are produced with one of two immediate aims in mind: either they are produced "for the record"--some, such as aides-mémoires, for the temporary record, and others for the permanent record, or archives; or they are produced as programme material--that is, for more or less immediate publication. Both can be valuable as historical sources, and both can pose problems--basically the same problems one encounters with all other historical sources. It is entirely possible, for instance, to produce bogus sound documents, and to tamper with genuine ones. Their authenticity, as well as their credibility and reliability, are therefore always open to question. Unfortunately neither audible documents nor "live" oral testimony can claim to be any better in this regard than other historical sources, but they are probably no worse!

Any document poses problems of handling and use arising from its physical form. Not surprisingly, because they do not consist in writing-on-paper, "audible documents" pose a set of problems peculiar to themselves for

the archivist who will have custody of them and the historian who will want to delve into them. Sound images are recorded by converting them into physical imprints on suitable materials (plastics, metal, metal oxides) mostly in the shape of discs or tapes. Some of these documents are fragile from the outset (frangible discs; tapes with such thin backing that magnetic "print-through" occurs from one layer to the next on a reel). Improper storage and handling can encourage any propensity these records may have to deteriorate chemically or simply wear out. The healthiest storage environment for such materials is really no different from that for paper records: a dust-free atmosphere at constant, moderate temperature and humidity. There is only one extra consideration--and a vital one--in the care of magnetic-imprint recordings: this being the avoidance of electromagnetic fields (to be found around electrical equipment--motors, high-voltage lines, etc.), as they will obscure or obliterate the contents of those documents.[29]

The problem of access to the material contained in sound recordings is far more serious than the problem of their maintenance. Suitable playback devices must of course be available to convert back into sound the impressions on discs or tapes; they are simply impossible to "scan" in the way one can scan written or printed pages, and no one item on a sound recording is easily pin-pointed. The problems encountered here are similar to those encoun-

tered with microfilm, which also requires a "playback device" and with which it is also difficult to zero in on a given item supposedly contained in the film. Transcriptions of spoken materials on disc or tape are very useful, sometimes even sufficient in themselves for a researcher's purposes; but transcription is an expensive process, so there will likely never be as much of it done as scholars might wish. Synopses or summaries of untranscribed materials can help the researcher to judge what might be worth the time to listen to. And detailed indexes, preferably keyed to the approximate location of items on discs and tapes, are a necessity.[30] Devices have recently been invented for speeding up or slowing down the rate at which a tape recording may be played back without the usual distortion of its pitch (this is what makes a too-fast or too-slow playback unintelligible). With this "variable-speed, pitch-restored playback equipment," one can perform the audio equivalent of "poring over" a passage at half the normal rate of speech, or hustling through it at up to three times the normal rate.[31] Anyone who can suffer microfilm readers can probably suffer equipment like this, so there is every reason to believe it will eventually be widely used by researchers into sound documents. The notion of using gadgetry to get at historical data is becoming less and less alien. This is just as well, for it holds the key to more and more "stored" (as opposed to "live") source material all the

time, written as well as spoken. Some of the larger bodies of written source material, for instance the files of business, government and social agencies, may soon routinely have to be "brought back" on printouts from the tapes or discs on which they are stored.[32]

With the rise of the broadcasting and recording industries on the one hand, and on the other the increasing availability to the mass market of recording equipment that produces recordings of good quality yet is relatively inexpensive, portable, and simple to operate, more sound documents of all kinds are being created by professionals and amateurs alike. So historians now and henceforth are ever more likely to encounter this kind of documentation either centrally or peripherally in the course of their work. The historian himself can have a hand in producing a few such documents, "oral history" ones. But the vast preponderance he will have had no such hand in producing, even if they are contemporaneous with him. These, like all other documents whatsoever, he must simply get to know, if they are at all relevant to his field of study, and make of them what he can or will, as evidence of "what was" and "what happened". Oral history documents are in many ways tailor-made for historical purposes. What this means and how it is accomplished are discussed in the chapter after next. The brief one which intervenes, Chapter V, contains some thoughts on the value, to histor-

ians or students of history in general, of at least a brief encounter with oral sources and with contemporary history.

NOTES TO CHAPTER IV

1 "Contemporary History," p. 70. Schlesinger's emphasis.

2 Canadian journalist Barry Broadfoot (Ten Lost Years, 1973; Six War Years, 1974), in undertaking work as a "chronicler" to rescue evidence of some otherwise unrecorded aspects of our past (he characterised his work thus at a panel discussion, "Canadian Authors and Aural/Oral History," at the Canadian Aural/Oral History Conference, Simon Fraser University, 19 October 1974), is displaying a "social conscience" analogous to the "political conscience" evident in Schlesinger's statement.

3 Schlesinger, "Contemporary History," p. 71.

4 Loc. cit.

5 Loc. cit.

6 Alfred B. Rollins, Jr., "Oral History: a Description and Appraisal," part one of Report: the Oral History Project of the John Fitzgerald Kennedy Library, Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University, 1965 (hereafter cited as: Rollins, Report), pp. 16-19. See APPENDIX III for an extended excerpt from chapter 4, "Oral History and Modern Conditions," pp. 16-20 of this essay.

7 Rollins, Report, p. 6.

8 "It may be that we shall find ourselves going more to the interview to find a guide through the papers than, as has always been good practice, going to the papers to establish a guide for the interview." (Ibid., p. 19.)

9 Tillinghast in Specious Past argues quite convincingly that historians have generally been very sensitive to, and their work in some way a reflection of, their social milieu, i.e. "their own times". Schlesinger is a good example of this in our own time; so is Broadfoot. The expression "global village" is a Marshall McLuhanism; it is intended here simply in the sense of "small world", and minus the mumbo-jumbo about collective consciousness McLuhan seems to have meant the expression to convey (see The Gutenberg Galaxy: the Making of Typographic Man, Toronto, Signet Books, 1969 (copyright 1962), pp. 43-44).

10 Schlesinger, "Contemporary History," p. 70.

11 Rollins, Report, p. 16. "In social history the lack of written records has always been a problem."

12 Curtin, "Collecting Oral Data," p. 370.

13 Documentary sources cannot change as a result of repeated use, nor mount an active resistance to it, as "live" sources can--and do (see "Eskimos tell anthropologist to stay out of their life," Edmonton Journal, 24 June 1974, p. 11). Lewis A. Dexter warns that subjects can become "professional interviewees", givers on cue of "right answers", and that "certain classes of interviewers are destroying the natural resources upon which their profession depends, much like the lumber barons of the nineteenth century who laid waste great stands of timber." (Interviewing, p. 137.)

14 Canby, "Audible Document," pp. 16-19.

15 I remember as a student in the 1967 History 470 class, hearing Professor Lewis G. Thomas (now Professor Emeritus of History at the University of Alberta) speak about the "charm" of primary and original documents--a less detached way, in effect, to express this point about the informational or evidential value of both their content and their physical form. The expression seems a particularly apt one, for it contains, in addition to the element of recommendation, an element of warning: one can learn a great deal from actual contact with original and primary documents; one also has to guard against being swept off one's critical feet by them.

16 Leo La Clare, "Historical Sound Recordings in the Public Archives of Canada," Ottawa, Public Archives of Canada, July 1974 (hereafter cited as: La Clare, "Historical Sound Recordings"), p. 21.

17 Rollins, Report, pp. 11-12.

18 Louis Gottschalk, et al., The Use of Personal Documents in History, Anthropology, and Sociology, New York, Social Science Research Council Bulletin no. 53, 1945 (hereafter cited as: Gottschalk, Personal Documents), part one, "The Historian and the Historical Document," chapter II, "Types of Documents," p. 16.

19 Ibid., pp. 17-27. Essentially the same breakdown is to be found in Louis Gottschalk, Understanding History: a Primer of Historical Method, New York, Alfred A. Knopf, second ed., 1969, chapter V, "Where Does Historical Information Come From?" pp. 91-115, only part VII has been divided, to separate creative fiction from folkways, etc.

20 "Taped History," editorial in the Edmonton Journal, 13 August 1974, p. 4. The tapes being referred to, U.S. ex-President Nixon's, are alleged to have been made "for history". Philip D. Curtin says with reference to the field collection of oral data--but the point would seem to be

more widely applicable--that "hidden tape recorders or microphones should never be used. It is better to lose the few recordings that might have been made with hidden microphones than to risk a general loss of confidence and the consequent failure of the whole enterprise." ("Collecting Oral Data," p. 370. Curtin's emphasis.)

21 An item on CKUA radio noon news, 3 March 1975: the CBC claims it saves 80% of the $1.5 million cost of new videotape every year by erasing and re-using what it has on hand. (Incidentally it recently lost 11 programmes, worth $65,000, through accidental erasure. "It's a miracle more aren't lost!" says one CBC commentator.) During a conversation in the spring of 1973, Professor Lewis H. Thomas (my supervisor) commented to me that the CBC seems none too eager to set in the capacity of a public archives (i.e. admit many researchers into their archives). One good reason is that it has neither the budget nor the facilities to do so. This seems to be generally true, at least so far, of broadcasting agencies throughout North America.

22 In the case of spoken memoirs, contrast a programme series like "First Person Singular," the memoirs of the late Prime Minister Lester B. Pearson as broadcast on CBC television (i.e. "polished and published"), with any oral history interview in the archives.

23 Gottschalk, Personal Documents, pp. 19-20.

24 Ibid., pp. 21-22.

25 "I simply traveled around the country for a year with a notebook and a tape recorder, asking men and women one question only: 'What did you do in the war?'" (Barry Broadfoot, "Six War Years," Maclean's, vol. 87, no. 10 (1974), p. 25. This article is a preface to the following one, "Back Home and Over There," pp. 26-31, which contains excerpts from the then forthcoming book Six War Years.) Broadfoot continues on to explain his unorthodox procedure of not fully documenting the testimonies he collected: "I recorded their answers, but I didn't take their names, for the singular reason that the answers came from the ordinary, anonymous people you pass on the street every day. I wanted [to allow] them to [do] that way."

[illegible] Robert Orchard's [illegible]e, "Tape Recordings into [illegible] Southern Heritage, vol. 3, no. 1 (1974),

27 Gottschalk, Personal Documents, pp. 26-27. In an article about a musical group of the late 1960's, "Crosby, Stills, Nash & Young," the remark is made that, "since they disbanded [1970], their two albums have become oral

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histories of an era . . . ." ("Return of a Supergroup," Time (Canada Edition), vol. 104, no. 6 (5 August 1974), p. [illegible])

28 It has been called "instant history". See Rollins, "Voice," p. 518. "Recordings of the sounds of battle and barracks, of rostrum and caucus room are, of course, welcome to historians. If we could hear Napoleon and Washington, as we can still hear McCarthy, MacArthur or Eisenhower, we might understand both the little corporal and the founding father less romantically. One can only hope that the custodians of the new sound will preserve the groans of the wounded as well as the war whoops of the heroes."

29 Information gleaned from such sources as: the Archives Training Course (Library Science 456), University of Alberta Summer Session, 1973; handbooks (e.g. Willa K. Baum, Oral History for the Local Historical Society, Nashville, Tenn., American Association for State and Local History, 3d printing, 2d ed., 1974 (hereafter cited as: Baum, Oral History), 63 pp.; William J. Langlois, Aural History Institute of British Columbia Manual, Victoria, B.C., 1974 (hereafter cited as: Langlois, Manual), 52pp.; William G. Tyrrell, "Tape-Recording Local History," AASLH Technical Leaflet no. 35, History News, vol. 21, no. 5 (1966) (hereafter cited as: Tyrrell, "Tape-Recording Local History"), 12pp.); articles and papers (e.g. Curtin, "Collecting Oral Data"; La Clare, "Historical Sound Recordings"; also Leo La Clare and Denis Gagnon, "Méthodes & techniques d'histoire orale pour les chercheurs," Ottawa, PAC, 1974 (hereafter cited as: La Clare and Gagnon, "Méthodes"), 16pp.). An extensive list of references is to be found in Frank B. Evans, comp., The Administration of Modern Archives: a Select Bibliographic Guide, Washington, D.C., National Archives and Records Service, 1970, especially chapter XVII, "Sound Recordings," and chapter XXII, "Oral History."

30 References as in previous note. Wider acess to the very documents themselves--or rather to exact copies--has been made possible by the willingness of at least some repositories to take advantage of what might be called "duplication technology". Columbia University's Oral History Research Office, the Regional Oral History Office at the University of California, Berkeley, the Public Archives of Canada, Ottawa, and Aural History, Provincial Archives of B.C. all do this in one way or another. "The competent archivist finds fulfillment not in hoarding, as the miser has it, but in making available what he may." (Louis M. Starr, "Oral History: 25th Anniversary Report," New York, Columbia University, 1973, p. 10.)

31 Murray Schiffman, "Playback Control Speeds or Slows Taped Speech Without Distortion," Electronics, vol. 47, no. 17 (22 August 1974), pp. 87-94, with accompanying "Soundsheet" (demonstration disc recording).

32 Gerald M. Walker, "Word Processing Transforms Office Paperwork Routine," Electronics, vol. 48, no. 12 (16 June 1975), p. 90.

## CHAPTER V

## A PLACE FOR CONTEMPORARY HISTORY AND ORAL SOURCES IN THE GENERAL EDUCATION OF HISTORIANS

The historiography of the western world has been overwhelmingly oriented toward the written word. This is so mostly because it is the historiography of a culture "that uses writing for recording all events of the past that have a more than anecdotal interest."[1] The fact that Thucydides wrote his History is all-important in our knowing anything about him and his work, in their being borne along in the memory of our culture.

Oral testimony and oral tradition can be vehicles for history and historical evidence as surely as can the written word. In nomadic and non-literate cultures they are important vehicles for both sources on and stories about the past.[2] In sedentary and literate cultures (and those that comprise what is conventionally thought of as "western civilisation" are such), the spoken word loses out to the written word as the convenient and proper way to record or attest to events, commitments and the like. The written word thus largely supplants the spoken word and oral tradition as a vehicle for, among other things, histories and the evidence on which these "true stories of the past" are based. People who so esteem the written

word, and in whose lives it plays this large a part, can easily come to conceive of the study of "history" as being the study of a past at least distant enough to have yielded up "valid"--i.e. written--records of "what was" and "what happened". This is an understandable outlook, in the light of what has just been said about literate cultures, and there is nothing wrong with it as far as it goes. But it hardly takes account of all "historically interesting phenomena," if these be defined as whatever historians or students of history wonder about. It means a definite orientation toward certain historical subjects and sources, and away from others--if not intentionally, then by default. One of the implications of this is that contemporary history, the study of which often involves recourse to non-written sources, "has held a precarious status in the annals of historiography."[3] Though sources for the study of contemporary history are always at hand, and though the motives for pursuing such study have never changed much, still only occasionally has such work been done and taken seriously. For reasons discussed in the previous chapters, there has recently been a resurgence of interest in contemporary history; also a heightened awareness of and regard for the non-written in everyday matters both trivial and important--an awareness which historians today, being part of their society, would share.

But neither contemporary history nor non-written sources were the central issues, for historians or anyone

else, at the time, a century and more ago, when historical studies were "professionalised". Then, the tools of modern historical criticism were largely honed for use on written documents, as sources for political history. The ethics and priorities of nineteenth-century German historical scholarship, which was the main instigator of that "professionalization",[4] still govern historical scholarship today. The historical themes and subject areas most fully developed in the last half-century show this to be the case; and so do the terms of reference used in general historical methodology textbooks. Again, these precedents and principles are all very well as far as they go, but they do not go far enough in showing, by instruction or example, how to deal with the full range of subjects and sources of historical interest and value. For instance, and it is only one instance of omission among many, "Manuals or guides to the study of history which have been published for student use generally ignore oral evidence."[5] Historians and students of history tend to be more dogged than they are adventuresome in their approach to their work: once introduced to any type of source or research technique they will use it intelligently and resourcefully enough, but they are less likely to discover such things on their own.

Recent trends in historical studies, and the impact of twentieth-century technology, suggest that more historians all the time will be confronted with oral

sources and "audible documents" in the course of their work. One would hope they will be able to honour the best traditions of their discipline in the use of these sources: the historian's concerns for accuracy, detail, completeness, logical (i.e. common-sensical) interpretation, and intelligible explanation.

By no means all historians will be deeply involved with contemporary subjects, or with oral sources, or both. But there is nevertheless something to be said for alluding to both in, say, university-level survey courses for the appreciation of history, and in the basic training for historical practice that graduate programmes in History purport to be. The inclusion of contemporary subjects and oral sources in university historical studies would amount to something beyond mere pandering to current fads or responding to current priorities--though that might be reason enough, as these are not likely to pass away soon. More importantly, even a slight brush with these aspects of historical study might significantly enhance the student's awareness of the roles of perception, memory, the ephemeral, the accidental and so forth, in the totality of any scene or sequence of events, and in forming the record thereof. This is a valuable kind of insight for historians and their audience alike to bring into their study of any subject whatsoever. The student could gain such an insight into historical events readily enough from the contemplation of an event near himself in

time and place, one with which he is familiar, in which indeed he may have participated. An equivalent insight into the record of events can be gained by gathering and comparing sources on some such event in the recent past: both contemporaneous evidence (i.e. evidence produced during, or as part of, the event), if any, in whatever form; and retrospective accounts by participants or observers, often obtainable through personal interviews. Incidentally, any such personal contact with the actual "doers" and "sayers" involved in an event being studied historically is valuable to the student, if only in affording him the chance to experience for himself the ordinariness of a "great" historical character (in the rare instance that one is at hand), or the uniqueness of even the most "ordinary" character.[6] Without claiming that such exercises or experiences as these are the only route to this kind of understanding, one can still recommend them as valid options. Such insights as these once gained, by whatever means, will surely temper a student's approach to history ever after, whether he takes the part of producer of historical works, or member of the historians' audience; and whether he is more drawn to subjects in the recent, or in the remote past.

> Contemporary history serves scholars . . . by reminding them of the character of human motives. It is not necessary to agree with Hume about the uniformity of human nature to find in the comedy of the present an instructive check on the fancied grandeur of the past. "I have no expectation," wrote Emerson, "that any man will read history aright who thinks that what was done in a remote age, by men whose names have

> resounded far, has any deeper sense than what he is doing today." The besetting sin of the historian is to tidy up the past--to impute pattern to accident and purpose to fortuity. Any conscientious student of the present will, when he turns to the past, know better and give adequate scope to the play of contingency, chance, ignorance, and sheer stupidity.[7]

Their "equipment", the training, experience and insight which they bring to their task, determines the quality of work of all historians, regardless of the level on which they operate. And they operate on many levels: there are naive historians and sophisticated ones; non-"guild" as well as "guild" historians;[8] amateurs and professionals; and all permutations and combinations of these. There are good and bad examples of every kind of historian: of academics, popularisers, and "Sunday historians". They come to be effective in their work, or otherwise, by no single route. Therefore, modifications to the usual university "training course", such as those discussed above, could hardly be expected to effect any very immediate or widespread changes in historical practice. But they would eventually have a certain amount of impact, if only because the various species of historians continually take cues from one another as to what to study, and how to go about it.

NOTES TO CHAPTER V

1 Jan Vansina, Oral Tradition: a Study in Historical Methodology, trans. H. M. Wright, Chicago, Aldine Publishing Company, 1965, p. 6.

2 Ibid., chapter VI, "Historical Knowledge," gives types of oral tradition and explains the value of each as historical source material. See also Curtin, "Collecting Oral Data," passim.

3 Schlesinger, "Contemporary History," p. 69. See passage containing this phrase, quoted above, Chapter II, p. 17.

4 See same passage as indicated in note 3.

5 Thomas, "Historians and Oral History," p. 19.

6 Of course there is no guarantee that the student will "let himself learn" from this "educational experience" any more than from any other; he may, but then again he may not. Lewis Dexter, in the introduction to his book on Elite and Specialized Interviewing, says to beware the curriculum-required in-depth interview: "The interviewer must have some capacity to catch the interviewee's meanings, to perceive the framework within which he is talking, if he is to get much out of the interview. Otherwise he is simply recording verbal behavior; he lacks the capacity to 'listen with the third ear.' This leads to a . . . point, applicable especially to teachers (and their students) when a classroom requirement schedules a set of elite or depth interviews. More often than not, probably, these are wasteful and an imposition on the interviewee. Because, more often than not, the interviewer-student does not have enough background, enough knowledge, and enough sensitized imagination to catch the subtleties and complexities of what the interviewee is saying. In the first 'research' interview I ever conducted--as an undergraduate at the University of Chicago in an effort to find out something about how some ministers tackled certain problems of peace action--I was largely unfitted to understand what I was told. Having been brought up a Unitarian, studying in the secularized social-science atmosphere of the University of Chicago, I simply brushed aside statements about religious belief as irrelevant rationalizations; in making my attitude clear to interviewees (and in failing to record what they said) I simply did not let myself learn. Similarly, in the past several years--because I have, for instance, been active in Massachusetts state politics--I have been interviewed by several students, graduate and undergraduate. In most

cases, it seems to me they have tried to make the story I reported to them more coherent, more 'rational,' than in fact it was (as experienced by my associates and me in campaigns and in the Governor's office). . . . The interviewers wanted answers reporting sharply motivated behavior, whereas in fact, so far as I could recollect, we acted in response to a complex and often inchoate set of desires and beliefs which could not be stated sharply. . . .

"At any event, a course which requires or recommends elite interviewing by students should stress the importance of getting a good deal of background and of getting the student to try to listen to the interviewee's frame of reference. The phrase is deliberate; a large part of listening with a third ear is noting and adapting to a frame of reference different from one's own. One of the most general difficulties for students, I suspect, will be that suggested in the last paragraph; the experienced person in any field knows that things happen in a subtle, confused, foggy, complex way, which cannot be stated or codified simply; the person without practical experience and without much contact wants to sharpen and simplify." (pp. 19-20. Dexter's emphasis.)

7 Schlesinger, "Contemporary History," p. 74.

8 an expression used by Pardon E. Tillinghast in The Specious Past: Historians and Others to refer to academic or university historians.

# CHAPTER VI

## ORAL HISTORY: PURPOSES, PROCEDURES, AND STANDARDS

Statements about the theory and practice of oral history have been made both explicitly, in literature on the subject, and implicitly, in the actual projects themselves. Some of oral history's purposes, procedures and standards were established very early in the game; many of these were widely adopted and have persisted in very nearly their original form, while others have been modified considerably, as technological improvements or accumulated practical experience respectively permitted or required.

The term "oral history" was coined nearly thirty years ago to describe an innovative approach to the gathering of contemporary historical source material. It figured in the title of Professor Allan Nevins' "Oral History Research Office" at Columbia University, which set out in 1948 to obtain, by means of interviews, the memoirs of prominent Americans. The project began with interviews of New York civic leaders, conducted by Nevins himself, with an assistant to take notes.

> Wire- and then tape-recorders supplanted manual note-taking in 1949, additional financing was obtained . . . a staff was employed for research,

> interviewing and transcription of tapes into typescript, and the horizon expanded from local to national affairs.[1]

The memoirs so obtained are intended for research use, not for direct publication, and they are kept in Special Collections, Butler Library, with whatever restrictions on access to them the authors wished to impose. This collection of source material at Columbia has continued to grow in size and reputation.[2]

> Professor Nevins invented a wholly new way of creating the historical record; its use will enrich the writing and reading of history long after his generation of students, and their students, have left the scene.
>
> I use the term 'invented' with good reason: oral history is a concept that had to be created. The people now engaged in expanding it object strongly when their craft is confused with "instant history," [recordings of events-as-they-happen (cf. Chapter IV, n. 28, p. 59 above.) These are, of course, valuable in their own right.]
>
> But oral history, as Allan Nevins conceived it, is something else. It is the systematic attempt to enlist significant people into recording their memoirs while they are still able to do so effectively. It is spoken history, recorded accurately on tape, then transcribed and edited by the subject. The entire process takes place under the guidance of a trained historian.[3]

Nevins' "invention", and many variations on his theme, have caught on widely in North America and overseas. This has come about mostly because oral history fits in well with certain present-day historical and heritage-preservation concerns; also because the economic and technological means for undertaking such projects are quite widely available. A few oral history projects were begun in the 1950's, either independently or as adjuncts to already existing archival or historical research bodies;

their number and variety began to increase phenomenally in the 1960's.[4] There has been a corresponding growth of literature on oral history, and of public discussion and debate about it.[5] This "movement", as it might well be described, has been formally recognised and "institutionalised" in the late 1960's and early 1970's through the formation of oral history associations, a main objective of which has been to encourage the discriminate gathering and use of oral sources.[6] The use of oral history materials in published works is becoming less rare all the time, as the reserves built up by oral history projects grow larger and the dates fall due for "closed" memoirs to become open for research, as the existence of these collections becomes more widely known, and as the producers of historical works (be these lectures, broadcasts or books) undertake to gather their own oral history material.[7]

All these facets of the development of oral history attest in various ways both to the value of this type of oral testimony as an historical source, and to the several problems associated with it. As regards the value of oral history, the question was put thus in 1955:

> Is oral history uniquely essential to twentieth-century historical writing? Is it helpful in writing picturesque, descriptive, genealogical, or factual prose about the people and events of the last five and a half decades? . . . What does oral history give best: bare facts, sequence of events, causality, prime factors, statistics, long-dead emotions and motivations, synthesis, or mature interpretation?[8]

The answer which has emerged out of the subsequent twenty years' experience is that, if oral history is neither

"essential" nor "best" for any of these purposes, it has been useful in some instance or other for nearly all of them. A host of theoretical and practical problems confront individuals or institutions involved in any and all stages of the oral history process, from obtaining and handling this particular kind of source material, to consulting, evaluating, and using it properly as historical evidence. Responses to these problems have been many and varied, which is understandable enough when one considers just how many and various are the circumstances in which oral history projects have been undertaken, or in which oral history documents have been created or used.

There is concensus, among all those involved in any way with oral history, only on the necessary minimum of issues; beyond these, one finds a multitude of declared objectives, and of ways and means for attaining them. There are no irreconcilable conflicts of any consequence--only those between the ideal and the possible, which can never really be resolved, and those that would evaporate in a moment, if only the disputants would admit that different situations present different problems, which usually require different solutions.[9] Several specific points of unity, diversity, and dispute are noted in the sections below, which undertake to describe some of the major concerns of oral history practitioners, the various phases of the oral history process, and some characteristics of the oral history product.

## A. EARLY COMMENTARY ON ORAL HISTORY

Early statements about oral history were not of the naive, simplistic or wildly speculative sort one might expect. On the contrary, practitioners and advocates of oral history in the 1950's seem to have been amply aware of the dangers of over-promotion--more so than some of their latter-day counterparts, one might add.[10] The early commentators come across to a reader now as having been perhaps too strict in their definitions of acceptable purposes, procedures and standards for oral history, but in other respects their statements sound very current. And it may very well be that the disciplined nature of their activities and commentary is largely responsible for earning oral history the basic credibility it needed in order to become firmly established, and to survive the inevitable setbacks involved in growing and diversifying.

One such "practitioner and advocate", Owen Bombard, presented a paper in 1952 to a joint session of the American Historical Association and the American Association for State and Local History (AASLH); this paper was published as "Speaking of Yesterday: an Explanation of the Ford Motor Company Archives Oral History Project."[11] A reviewer has said of this paper that "it is the first serious discussion of oral history in print and [yet it] sets forth almost every detail that has since been elaborated upon. . . . It is a prototype of the best articles written on the subject."[12] Bombard claimed that "the sole

purpose of oral history is to increase the quantity and quality of historical sources, to decrease the shadows of historical twilight now illuminated only by partial documentation."[13] He emphasised that oral history memoirs are a supplement to, not a substitute for, traditional historical sources; that whenever an oral history record is produced, it should be in coordination with any existing sources, so as not to duplicate or contradict them needlessly.

> It might even be said that since oral history research creates records, it is necessary that even greater precaution be exercised than is the case in the selection of documentary collections [for preservation in archives].[14]

He stated that oral history programmes are under the usual archival obligation to make well-documented memoirs available to all qualified researchers. This entails some processing--indexing, transcribing, editing--beyond the interview-and-recording stage, for tapes are "an awkward research tool."[15] And of course researchers are granted access to such materials "in the belief that they will not accept any memory source without applying the standards of criticism commonly accepted by the historical profession."[16]

Bombard did not presume to generalise, on the basis of the one programme whose operation he was describing, as to how all oral history programmes should be implemented. But another commentator soon undertook to do this. Vaughn Bornet read a paper to the AASLH in 1954 which was published as "Oral History Can Be Worth-

while," in the American Archivist, July 1955. It was an "attempt to introduce standards to guard against the abuses inherent in the facility of the technique, and to fortify its scholarly orientation."[17] Bornet observed in this paper that oral reminiscences were being amassed through projects at Columbia University, the Ford Motor Company, the Wisconsin State Historical Society, and elsewhere in the United States, and that "the first book of historical scholarship to be based in part on formal oral history has recently appeared."[18] He declared that the time had come for oral history manufacturing to be standardised, and for the nature of its final product to be clearly understood:

> A handful of the members of the historical and archival professions are convinced of the value of oral history. If the remainder--the doubters--are to be won over, the reminiscence-manufacturing industry must set and maintain high and uniform standards for its final product. That product is not the book that the oral-history promoter may have in mind when interviews are conducted.
> The true oral-history product is the final typed memoir, the faithfully produced and standardized reminiscence, deposited in the archives for later generations.[19]

Bornet therefore proposed a set of "standards for the manufacture of reminiscences with a recording device."[20] These sensibly avoided specifying such things as what types of people should be interviewed, about what, by whom, and in what manner, as there are many equally valid possibilities. All that was said on these matters was that interviewers should be adequately trained and prepared for the projects they undertake, for "few men and

women will want to submit to more than one series of oral history interviews. A poor job can neither be rewritten nor repeated."[21] Bornet claimed that adherence to a particular set of standards, such as those he was suggesting, would distinguish the "true oral-history reminiscence" from the "ordinary interview", and could safeguard against some of the problems which ordinary interviews, especially careless ones, pose for scholars who would use them. His standards give heavy emphasis to documentation of the interview, so that researchers using it might have external as well as internal evidence at their disposal. Most of the items Bornet proposed have to do with: 1) providing adequate background information on the person interviewed; 2) describing the actual circumstances of the oral history interview--factual data, impressions; 3) processing the recorded interview into an accessible and intelligible document--ideally a full verbatim transcription ("both questions and answers"), with corrections and emendations; 4) defining the legal status of the oral history document--its ownership and authorship (remember such documents are joint creations), and conditions for its access and use; 5) announcing the existence of oral history documents, so that scholars will know about them and use them; and 6) citing oral sources, whenever they are used in published works, in such a manner that credit is given to all due it for their part in the creation of those sources.

> The permanence of the transcript of an oral-history interview places special responsibilities on the craftsmen who evoke these reminiscences for deposit in libraries and archives.[22]

The principles and procedures Bornet advocated were to aid in the fulfilment of these responsibilities. Some of his "standards for the manufacture of reminiscences with a recording device" are "still considered avant garde"; others, such as his notion that the voice record need not be kept if transcriptions of interviews are made, show Bornet's view of the tape (primarily as a means rather than an end) to be typical of early practitioners of oral history, and place him "against today's prevailing trend."[23] Accumulated experience may have changed some of our ideas about what constitutes oral history, and what procedural and quality standards it should have. But the rationale for standards of some sort has changed little. Bornet's standards were intended:

> (a) to keep the person interviewed from wasting valuable time, (b) to attract further financial support from foundations and other sources of funds, (c) to keep historical researchers of the future from condemning the product of historian-interviewers of today, and (d) to protect the public from receiving misleading or false information about the past.[24]

After twenty years, every element in this rationale--the crass and the vain as well as the altruistic--still seems to apply as much as ever.

B. OBJECTIVES

There are certain preoccupations and certain basic assumptions which all of the individuals and insti-

tutions involved in oral history work have in common. Attention centres in every case on material that has been spoken (told, recited, sung); and there is a definite interest in the verbatim record of such material, either as an end in itself or as a means to some further end. Above all there is in every case a belief in the value, or at least the validity, of spoken reminiscences and oral traditions as historical sources. This "basic assumption" is the sine qua non of oral history work, the conviction which sustains all active involvement in it, and all material and moral support for it. The belief has fairly wide credence, to judge by the present profusion of oral history programmes and projects.

But despite these common denominators among the many oral history projects that have been or are being undertaken, objectives and emphases have hardly been the same for any two of them. Some major groupings can, however, be identified. Three categories, into one or another of which most projects can be said to fall, according to their main objective or emphasis, are: 1) oral history to create records, 2) oral history in the course of research, the intended result of which is a published work, and 3) oral history for education. To create unique or supplementary historical records "for the use of scholars generally" was the declared purpose of the first oral history projects so named. This continues to be the major emphasis in the many ongoing or open-ended projects,

modelled on those originals, that have been established since. "Programmes" of this sort come in all shapes and sizes. They have been sponsored both privately and publicly, and carried out on both modest and grand scales. Just about all oral history programmes are to be found in association with other archival or heritage-preservation activities carried on by individuals, or by institutions such as government departments, universities, businesses and organisations of various kinds.[25] Those few begun as independent enterprises soon seek out such an "umbrella" for both economic and functional reasons. Oral history programmes operate in much the same ways, requiring much the same facilities and incurring much the same costs--all in pursuit of much the same objectives as any archival institution: like archives, they are costly operations that cannot directly pay their own way;[26] like archives, they are basically "altruistic" or service enterprises whose primary concern is "to gather information that will be of scholarly usefulness to the present and the future."[27] Activities of these programmes may occasionally include the production of published works based on the material they gather, or the performance of training or educational functions; but these are subordinate to the record-creation and -preservation process, i.e. the archival function, of this kind of oral history work.

Oral history work is also done in the course of research projects carried out with a view to publication.

There have been untold numbers of "oral history projects" of this sort, most of which would never have thought to style themselves thus. These projects are usually, of necessity, short-term and narrow in scope (i.e. "directed", "focussed"), though some have been quite extensive.[28] Oral history research may be central to any given project, or quite a minor part of it. Either way, oral history records of possible use to others may be a byproduct. "The interviewer who is collecting oral history materials for his own individual research should always bear in mind this broader objective."[29] Priorities are priorities, though, and it is not always possible for researchers bent on publication to perform this laudable service, or to perform it as adequately as those who spend their whole effort on the creation of oral history records, the "oral history practitioners", might hope.[30] Still, many creditable oral history documents on deposit in archives are the byproducts of research and publication ventures.[31]

In the category of "oral history for education" may be included all programmes or projects whose raison d'être is teaching or learning. Some of these are intended as training courses in oral history techniques. While self-teaching or on-the-job training have been the traditional routes to competence or expertise, workshops and formal courses sponsored by oral history associations, or by individual programmes or practitioners, are becoming more and more widely available.[32] Others use oral history

research, or the study of oral history materials, as a means to some broader educational end, for instance an appreciation of regional or cultural heritage, or an understanding of the nature of historical knowledge and practice. Training courses are mainly found in the sphere of adult education, both inside and outside the university setting. Projects or courses of the second kind, where oral history is a means or device, can be and have been undertaken at every educational level, from elementary to advanced.[33] Archive-quality oral history documents, or publications based on oral history work, or both, may result from these training labs and educational experiments with the technique; but such "results" cannot be guaranteed, nor should they be expected. Projects in oral history for education are much less reliable vehicles for the generation of archival or research data of high quality, on a continuing basis, than projects in either of the first two categories mentioned above. Indeed warnings have been issued to the effect that this latter function, valuable as it might be in its own way, should not be allowed to encroach on the others' territory--to ruin good ground for serious research, wherever any such is being planned.[34] They are valid warnings against a real danger, though the danger is not that difficult to avoid, given a minimal sense of responsibility, a minimal awareness of possible implications, on the part of teachers or students encouraging or undertaking projects in oral history "for education".

C. SCOPE AND APPROACHES

The scope of oral history projects and programmes, the approaches they use in gathering their material, and therefore the nature of that material, are matters quite independent of their main objectives and emphases as described above. Any project, on any scale, in any category as far as main objective or emphasis is concerned, can cast its net more or less broadly, as befits its particular means and purposes. The scope of oral history projects and programmes has in some instances been defined mainly by geographic boundaries, and in others mainly by subject areas, large or small.[35] Projects may focus on an individual life, event or issue, or they may take in whole "periods", "eras", "regions" or "peoples". Because they are historical projects, the testimonies sought by and given to them tend to emphasise the particular and the unique--material that is itself a "true story of the past", or from which such stories could be drawn. Oral history collections can of course be used for other purposes, interpreted in other ways, by any researcher who sees fit; but they are created primarily with historical interests in mind. Incidentally, the records of interviews done by anthropologists (and they do a great many) often make excellent historical sources, for although what they seek to discover is "the 'typical man' and the ordinary everyday pattern of life which he describes," what they usually obtain are a lot of particulars--from which

anthropologists may generalise to their hearts' content, but which historians, for instance, might use for their own purposes.[36]

Whatever their scope and orientation, oral history projects and programmes may be set up to seek material that is either more autobiographical or more topical in nature. The decision as to which of these extremes in approach to emphasise or what mix of them to use may be a rather arbitrary one, or may follow quite logically from the choice of subject, in any given project.

> This decision will clearly determine the entire conduct of the operation: the selection of interviewees, the style of interviewing, the length of the interview and to a large extent, the time when it should take place--closer to or at a greater distance from the event [or time, or whatever, that is the focal point of the project].[37]

The autobiographical approach in gathering oral history material is generally thought to be ideal, because of the scope it offers interview subjects for telling their own story their own way. The approach implies a minimum of intrusion between the givers of testimony and future researchers; a minimum of prejudgement or definition by intermediaries, such as the interviewer, of areas of importance, terms of reference, and the like.[38] Used as a tactic, even when something other than a full autobiographical memoir is a project's intended objective, this approach can be a good means to establish and maintain rapport: many interview subjects find both the prospect

and process of autobiographical interviews very pleasing and satisfying.[39] To a certain extent this approach is "simply inherent in the oral history process": material that is in some sense autobiographical is the inevitable product of any oral history interview, regardless of whether the subject's life or some specific topic is its focal point, "because the oral history interview is intensive and personal."[40] In fact it is only occasionally that the goal of an oral history project has been to obtain anyone's full autobiographical memoirs; and even then, what often results are autobiographical sketches, with only those parts or episodes treated in detail that the interviewees chose, or that the interviewers could persuade them, to dwell on. Even the most autobiographically-oriented project may consider seeking testimony about its main subjects from people who knew them. This supplementary material would be obtained in topical interviews, the "topic" being the life of the central figure in question.

For a number of reasons, the topical approach in gathering oral history material has been more widely adopted. Whatever the ideal,

> almost all programs seem to have experienced the same need to focus their resources by a move toward specialization, revising their concept of the interview accordingly.[41]

The topical approach, concentrating on specific times, places, events or whatever, has been found to be practical. For instance, "the ratio of preparation time is much

better in [these] special projects."[42] For autobiographies, each "life" requires separate background research and preparation; for topics or "special subject areas", one body of background research often does for interviews with many different people. The topical approach implies much more "guiding" or "direction" on the part of the interviewer--though there should never be too much. While a project will never get testimony on its chosen topic if its interviewer does not ask for it, never should the interviewer's questions be so structured, so "leading", as to permit his subject no independence of expression; such an "interview" would be no interview at all, but rather a travesty of the standardised questionnaire. The topically-oriented project can usefully employ the tactics of autobiographical interviewing, that is, permit witnesses to tell their part of the story their own way. But in any type of oral history interview, a judicious amount of "guidance" is often appreciated by the interview subjects, and it makes for more substantive interviews; it can stimulate the subjects' recall, and it certainly makes for more efficient use of their time. Furthermore, there is nothing wrong with such "interference" or "management" on the part of the interviewer; oral history interviews are not impromptu affairs in any case: they are contrived situations.[43] All that matters, as far as the resulting document is concerned, is that the interviewer's questions as well as the interviewee's answers be recorded, so that

anyone consulting the oral history record can tell how much and what sort of "direction" those questions provided. To a certain extent, such "direction" is as inevitable a part of the oral history process, as autobiography is a result of it. Even the most extensive and free-wheeling autobiographical interviews, if done as oral history projects, have to be organised and directed to some degree, jointly, by the subject giving testimony and the historian-interviewer eliciting it. Uncritical and stream-of-consciousness testimonies are not the business of oral history projects. To be sure, there are instances where the interviewer intervenes very seldom once testimony is under way, but still enough to prevent the resulting statement from being just a reflection of the subject's "own imagination about himself."[44] Individuals may of course create whatever kinds of records they wish, including fanciful spoken ones, on their own; but oral history projects, drawing as they do directly or indirectly on the public wealth, and purporting as they do to serve scholarly or other altruistic ends, must strive for a certain minimum of organisation and substance in the records whose creation they foster.

Sometimes a great deal of guidance and direction (as in topical interviewing), sometimes very little (as in autobiographical interviewing), proves to be the "process that evokes as nearly as possible the complete and the contemporary impression"[45] of the life or other

topic at issue. There is no single approach that will always guarantee this universally desired result of oral history work.

D. INTERVIEWING

Oral history documents may record various kinds of oral testimony, including monologues, lectures or speeches, debates and discussions; but most are records of interviews. Interviewing, and thereby obtaining a document, is one of the larger concerns of "oral history", where this term denotes a method in historical work rather than a kind of source material. The other main concern of oral history-as-method is management and use of the documents obtained, matters which are discussed under other headings below.

Interviewing is "conversation with a purpose".[46] Being "conversation", the interview is a personal interaction or "transaction"; it is a social situation from which both (or all--there are sometimes more than two) parties involved must derive some immediate satisfaction, or they are not going to want to continue with it. But the interview also has a "purpose" beyond pleasure in the social situation itself; this purpose is, in the case of oral history interviews, the recording of personal recollections of possible interest and use as historical source material. So presumably the participants in an interview are working at least as hard at attaining that purpose as they are at getting the most out of the social interaction.

One implication of this is that there is likely to be less spontaneity in the interview situation than there might be in casual conversation (this is only a matter of degree, as very few social transactions are entered into aimlessly, and therefore with no particular limits on the direction they might take). Another implication is that there is likely to be more extensive use of "technique", that is, more preparation and forethought, and more use of strategy and tactics, in the interview than would be considered necessary or even decent in everyday conversation. To state that spontaneity is likely to be circumscribed in the interview situation is not to suggest that there is no place for it at all; on the contrary, no worthwhile interview is without some element of it. Similarly, one need not equate the use of technique in interview situations with coldblooded purposefulness; purposefulness, yes, but this is not necessarily coldblooded. Indeed, a deliberate approach is required on the part of <u>both</u> interviewer and interviewee if there is to be any hope that the record of their "conversation with a purpose" will contain what both parties, not just the former or just the latter, wanted it to contain. From these preliminary remarks about what the interview situation entails, the discussion in this section now proceeds to such matters as: when such a situation might arise, who might enter into it, either as interviewer or interviewee, what they may hope to accomplish through it, and how.

One could conceivably settle on interviewing as a research method first, and then choose problems to suit the method, or one can first settle on a problem and then choose methods of investigation to suit. Perhaps no self-respecting researcher would want to admit to taking the former approach; certainly the latter sounds the more scientific way to proceed. But in practice both approaches are used, and it is quite possible for either to have good results, provided the researcher, whatever his starting point, is prepared to be flexible, to revise or expand either his methods or his subject of inquiry should the need arise.[47]

When, preferably after due deliberation, one decides in favour of interviewing as a way to obtain certain information, one must then determine what kind of interview is best suited to eliciting that kind of information. At one extreme, interviews can be very pre-structured--almost the oral equivalent of written questionnaires; at the other, they can be quite unpre-structured (which is not the same thing, be it noted, as unprepared-for). The former is the procedure for standardised interviews; the latter, the procedure for what Lewis Dexter calls "elite interviews".[48] Elite interviews are

> [those] with <u>any</u> interviewee--and stress should be placed on the word "any"--who in terms of the current purposes of the interviewer is given special, non-standardized treatment. By special, non-standardized treatment I mean
>
> 1. stressing the interviewee's definition of the situation,

2. encouraging the interviewee to structure the account of the situation,

3. letting the interviewee introduce to a considerable extent (an extent which will of course vary from project to project and interviewer to interviewer) his notions of what he regards as relevant, instead of relying upon the investigator's notions of relevance.

> Put another way, in standardized interviewing--and in much seemingly non-standardized interviewing too . . . --the investigator defines the question and the problem; he is only looking for answers within the bounds set by his presuppositions. In elite interviewing, as here defined, however, the investigator is willing, and often eager to let the interviewee teach him what the problem, the question, the situation, is--to the limits, of course, of the interviewer's ability to perceive relationships to his basic problems, whatever these may be.[49]

There are certainly times when the circumspect approach of the elite interview will serve no one's interests well, neither the researcher's nor his informant's. Whenever one can get swiftly to the point, one should do so. But very often there is no other way to get worthwhile testimony than by the "elite interviewing" approach, because "standardized treatment" or "set questions" would lead either to the prospective interviewee's being put off (if he is insistent on telling his own story in his own terms or not at all), or to his giving only what he conceives to be the "right answers" (if he is an obliging sort) to the interviewer's questions. There are so many possible combinations of seeker and giver of information and topic of discussion that it would be difficult to outline, in any useful way, what topics should be handled in what ways by what combinations of interviewer and interviewee.

> Indeed, there are no universal rules about how best to conduct an interview, excepting only "It depends. . . ." What may be suicidal or impractical for one interviewer or in one situation may be feasible or even the best way to proceed for another interviewer or in another situation.[50]

Quite apart from the issue of whether interviewing as a research method is theoretically appropriate, is the issue of whether it is practically possible in any given instance. First of all, the instigator of such a project will get nowhere fast if he cannot do the required interviewing himself or find accomplices to do it for him. Very few people are good interviewers "naturally", or become so "by accident"; few people become socially adept in <u>any</u> sense that way! Most become so by a very deliberate process of "perceptorship".[51] A good "perceptor" will obtain, formally or informally, whatever instruction, example and exercise he can. He will then draw on these as from a body of valuable and relevant experience when interviewing on his own; that is, he will neither forget it entirely nor repeat it mechanically. So this is not to say that there already exists, or ever shall, a master set of techniques one can study and thereby become a good interviewer:

> Let me say that to reduce interviewing to a set of techniques is . . . like reducing courtship to a formula. . . . There is a danger of too much reliance on [a standard set of] tools and not relying sufficiently on old-fashioned intuition as to which tool to use in which situation. . . .
> We should truly play it by ear . . . .[52]

While one can safely say that the "compulsive talker" is not likely to be a successful interviewer under

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any circumstances, it is less easy to be specific about positive personal qualities.[53] What is a suitable manner or approach in one combination of interviewer, interviewee and situation may not be in another. More to the point than to specify what kind of person an interviewer should be or how he should conduct himself--there are simply too many valid possibilities--might be to note that it behooves the interviewer to know what kind of person he himself is, and what kinds of roles he can credibly play in what interview situations.[54] By the way, there is nothing dishonourable about role-playing in these situations; and in any case it is unavoidable, unless or until the parties involved can get around to dealing with one another "person to person".[55] The interviewer will inevitably be cast into some role, that is, perceived in some particular way, by those whom he interviews anyway; so he might as well be aware of the fact and make the best of it. If he can ethically advance his purposes by acting in certain ways rather than others, by playing up certain traits in himself or facts about his project, and playing down others, there is no harm in his doing so. For example, one social scientist found that,

> in an upstate New York Women's Christian Temperance Union group his status as a professor pleased them; they liked working with a professor. They had middle-class notions of status. But in Illinois, where the W.C.T.U. group was lower in class level, and did not value professorial prestige, his status cut no ice. He had, with them, to take the role of someone working on a thesis, who needed help--and

> evidently these women were of the kind who like (or feel an obligation) to aid a person who needs help.[56]

There will of course be times when, for reasons of temperament or of limited repertoire, an interviewer finds that there is no possibility for him to succeed with a particular interviewee; but generally, being no less adaptable than other humans, the interviewer who is determined enough (or in lieu of that, not too proud to surrender the task to an alternate) can find a way. Yet his zeal should be tempered by reflection on the fact that:

> The respondent is a human being. Whatever value the scholar may attach to the enlightenment he hopes to acquire through information obtained in the interview, he also ought to place a value on the dignity, privacy, and courtesy of the person who has granted him the interview. . . . The moral limits of interviewing deserve . . . [his] thoughtful attention every bit as much as . . . examples of craftily successful questioning.[57]

The fact that interviewing may be the best or at least a good way to obtain information for a particular project, and that capable interviewers are at hand, is quite beside the point if likely and willing interview subjects cannot be found. For several reasons the approach to any prospective interviewee has the character of "a minuet of courtship . . . rather than a bare request crudely offered or refused."[58] It is not necessary, in order to let it be known what he is after, for an interviewer to "lay out a detailed schedule" to a prospective interview subject at their first meeting. To do this might in some cases scare away very valuable interview subjects:

> In a conference on oral history, someone once asked how it was possible to get someone . . . to submit to [what might run to as many as] 75 or so hours of taping and the innumerable preparatory hours necessary if an adequate job were to be done. The answer was, of course, that one would not dream of posing the whole job at the start. One commences with an hour and hopes to nurse the . . . subject along until the massive job is finished.[59]

In other cases, no matter how promising the prospect, an interview once actually begun may prove fruitless, for any of countless reasons that could not have been foreseen. If this should happen, the interviewer may well want to back off, and he will find this much easier to do if he has made no specific promises as to how many or what kind of interview sessions he would be undertaking.[60]

The interviewer hopes to get information relevant to his inquiries from his sessions with an interviewee, and if he does, he is amply rewarded. Anything beyond this, either in the way of unexpected information, or enjoyment of the interview relationship, he can regard as a bonus. But one may well ask what leads a person to enter into the other side of this situation, to become an interview subject, when he can usually expect "no return to himself aside from the warm visceral reaction which is supposed to be the reward of people who have done good."[61] Indeed,

> the main problem oral history people face is not finance or technique but the difficulty of persuading subjects to submit to the ordeal. Everything except a historical conscience or deep personal pride cries out against it. Being interviewed may be unpleasant, certainly time consuming, very likely embarrassing; and it may be dangerous. One is being asked to place one's naked recollections, however devastating to

> oneself or others, at the mercy of some group of historians and clerks. And anyone who hopes to use the interview as a means of concocting a favorable history is probably deluding himself. It is far easier to plant an exculpating memorandum in one's files for historians to discover when one is beyond the reach of impertinent questions.
>
> And there are conflicts of loyalty. Why <u>should</u> one tell the whole truth when to do so makes one look silly, or reflects on one's family or friends? A man's belief in the importance of history must be strong to override the claims of love and loyalty. This was one of the great difficulties with Eleanor Roosevelt as a historical source. She had too sprightly a commitment to the present, and too warm a heart for both friends and enemies, to be willing to remember the evil, or the sad, or even the awkward things about them.[62]

There is undoubtedly the occasional person possessed of the requisite emotional detachment, "historical conscience", pride or whatever, to carry him through as an oral history interview subject. But for most people, while these motives might be enough to get them started, they are not enough to sustain them in the effort. Nor can it be said that material rewards of any kind sustain such effort, for these are seldom expected and seldom offered. What must sustain it, then, is the immediate satisfaction to be derived from involvement in, and accomplishment through, the interview-and-recording sessions themselves.

> Probably the greatest value which many interviewees receive--the reason why they enjoy the interview--is the opportunity to teach, to tell people something.
>
> . . .
>
> Many interviewers and investigators have commented upon the pleasure informants and interviewees get out of teaching; it seems to be, for instance, almost a commonplace in anthropological field work that one reason why the anthropologist starts to learn a new language is not only that it is indeed necessary, but that it gives informants and subjects an opportunity to take the role of teacher.[63]

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Another plus for the interviewee is the opportunity the interview affords for talking to an "understanding stranger":

> People of importance (like people of unimportance) often have no real opportunity to talk to an understanding stranger--meaning, by a stranger, someone who will presumably make no claims, no use of the remarks, which will affect the speaker in the future. When a man is talking to his personal assistant, or his wife, or his colleague about his job or his problems, they may understand him very well. But there is always the possibility that something said to these people--a speculation or interpretation--will annoy or irritate, or will commit the speaker in some way in which he does not want to be committed. Furthermore, conversation with wives, colleagues, personal assistants, about general matters, general considerations, one's own history and development, is often difficult simply because it is intruded upon by practical, immediate considerations, . . . Yet a good many people in a specialized position do have some taste for self-analysis, or for discussing the nature of what they do in general terms, or simply for telling people in detail what they have done. Most strangers simply do not know enough, do not know the right vocabulary, interrupt with "stupid" and irrelevant comments, have to have too much explained to them. So the interviewer who has bothered to "understand," who knows what the interviewee is talking about, whose comments are relevant, but who will not make any future claims, . . . can indeed provide a pleasurable experience to the interviewee.[64]

If both interviewer and interviewee find the interview satisfying enough to follow it through to completion (and this is not an entirely rare occurrence, to judge by the number of completed oral history interviews in existence, transcribed or on tape) they may become joint authors of an oral history document. The testimony that goes on record through this process can be of many different kinds. It may be largely hard-factual in substance (i.e. description and narration of "what was" and

"what happened"), or it may be interpretive (i.e. explanations, generalisations). It may contain material long-forgotten, or material that has been revived and rehearsed (silently or aloud) many times before being given in the interview. It may be very dilute or quite concentrated, both in substance and in style. The nature and validity of this testimony depend most basically, one must suppose, on the competence and honesty of the interviewee as a memoirist, and on the skill of the interviewer as a stimulator of recall. But it depends just as crucially on the timing and setting of the interviews where the testimony is recorded; that is, on the willingness of individuals, theoretically competent to ask or tell about a particular matter, to discuss that matter then, there, and with each other.

The testimony in oral history documents is based on fallible recollections of fallible perceptions and influenced by the particular social situation (the interview) in which it is given. The quality of such testimony as historical source material is always partly a matter of chances and circumstances that cannot be anticipated, but beyond these it can be considerably influenced (sometimes for better, sometimes for worse) by conscious effort--by advance preparations, and by techniques used in the interview situation--on the part of both interviewer and interviewee. For instance:

> Precisely what one can remember depends upon how one's memory is stimulated. I could not recall without

> warning an automobile accident in which I participated as a child of five; I certainly could not remember the date, nor the precise location. But when I was shown a photograph of the wreck and told when and where it happened--facts available in court records or newspapers--I could then remember a few significant facts which no one else knew . . . . [The] busy public official cannot possibly remember, on sudden questioning, what happened at this or that meeting. But if asked to confirm a journalistic statement about that meeting, he will know at once whether he thinks it sound, and this may, in turn, lead him to a more specific recall of the actual circumstances.[65]

There are memories of observations and concrete experiences to be elicited by this process, but there are remembered judgements and explanations as well; and all have their validity and use as historical source material:

> Oral history will be most useful when it seeks direct recall of specific happenings. The subject's afterthoughts, prejudices and emotions are less likely to intervene then; and the attempt to recall the factual situation will be more likely to serve the interests of future historians, less likely to be artificially restricted to what seems momentarily relevant in the light of some temporary theory or construction of the situation. Therefore the first objective of the oral historian should be the specific recall of factual items not otherwise recorded, or inadequately recorded in the written evidence. The techniques will vary immensely with the specific circumstances. One does not generally get at this kind of recall by asking what happened. Rather, one primes the situation by asking the interviewee to evaluate either some contemporary description of the incident under consideration or some generalization about the situation.
>
> But specific recall of what was said and what was done is not the sole end, . . . It is still useful to be concerned with what the subject <u>thought</u> about the situation, specifically his own attitude toward the people around him, his own personal judgements about what motivated those with whom he worked, or what was significant in shaping certain situations. Here the historian is on more difficult ground than he occupied when concerned with the questions of action and speech, and the change [sic--probably meant "chance"] of warping by the later experience of the interviewee

> is large. But the judgements of participants can nevertheless be revealing, in oral form just as they can in the written form of the autobiography. And reliable or not, they may raise questions which historians would not otherwise have considered; and they may be immensely revealing of the nature of the interviewee himself.[66]

The interviewer can be of little help in stimulating his subject's recall, either factual or interpretive, if he cannot ask the right questions. And he cannot "ask the right questions" unless he has obtained adequate knowledge of the topic to be discussed, and established adequate rapport with the interview subject. The rapport is necessary because <u>how</u> you ask something of a particular person is as important as <u>what</u> you ask, in determining whether you get an answer at all, let alone a satisfying one; and you must know the person a little in order to know how to put questions to him. The principle that "it takes information to get information"[67] is as operative in oral history interviewing as in any other kind. Some advance preparation in the topic of discussion is necessary for interviewers whose background does not automatically fit them for the task, not only so that their questions may be informed, but so that they may recognise whether they are getting worthwhile testimony from the interviewee. However, the interviewer has to be careful about the extent to which he reveals his preparedness or supposed qualifications to any interviewee: while in some cases the interviewee might take such a revelation as indicating genuine interest in himself and what he has to say, and

therefore be encouraged by it,[68] more often it will be a burden to the interview subject, causing him to feel that, really, he has little or nothing to add to the interviewer's obviously vast store of knowledge![69]

An interviewer armed with background knowledge, and capable of using the same intelligently and discreetly in the interview situation, can have a positive influence on the value of any resulting testimony as historical source material. But he is only one factor, mentioned first because he is usually the instigator. More important is the interview subject, the "witness", the bearer of the testimony. With the best of prompting, the most honest and clear-headed interview subject can, in any particular situation, give only part of what he has retained in memory; and he will in any case have remembered only part of what he has observed and experienced:

> Whenever a witness testifies to events and his testimony is recorded, the following sequence or chain between the events and the record of them has taken place:
>
> | | |
> |---|---|
> | . . . events | --witness perceives events. |
> | . . . [time interval] | --witness transmits testimony by keeping it in his memory. |
> | . . . interview | --witness releases testimony and this is recorded by hand or on tape. |
>
> The relation between the events and the events as described in the document has therefore undergone the following "distortions": events--part of events are perceived--part of the perception is stored in the memory of a man and colored by his personality--part of what is in the memory of the man is released and the release is colored by the interview. There is quite definitely a loss of information between the

> event and the record of it. There is also, and this is less obvious, quite an accretion to the record of the event by the reflections and personality of the witness.[70]

Neither interviewer nor interviewee can do anything to influence the latter's observations of past events, or anything about the process by which they were remembered in the interim, since these are already over and done with. But some information about these processes should be entered into the oral history record, either in the course of the interview itself or in explanatory notes, so that anyone referring to the testimony later will be relieved of the necessity to make guesses about them. This type of information must figure in any proper estimate of the nature and validity of oral testimony as historical source material.[71]

The interview subject's past observations and experiences, and the means whereby he kept them in memory, may be accomplished facts by the time an interview is contemplated; but the timing and setting of the interview are certainly not preordained. Both interviewer and interviewee can have a say in arranging these details; indeed both parties must be at least passively in accord with the time and place arrangements, or the interview simply cannot happen. Because these things will also have their effect on any testimony that goes on record, they too should be duly noted for the information of later users of the record. Whenever a decision is to be made on the setting for an interview, privacy should be a major

consideration. Privacy, so that the interview participants may speak freely and uninterruptedly with one another, is important to the ultimate substance and continuity of the oral history testimony obtained; and in the immediate situation, privacy may be important to the interviewee's peace of mind, especially if he is discussing matters that he does not ordinarily discuss, for whatever reason, with his everyday associates. Another consideration which might enter into the choice of place is the fact that, to some extent at least,

> "the situation remembers, not the man" or, more prosaically put, the immediate environment determines the roles people assume and consequently what they remember, and also most people are reminded by logically irrelevant sights, sounds, and smells, of events and attitudes they otherwise would forget.[72]

Where practically possible, therefore, the interviewer and interviewee might well meet in a place that offers the most as a stimulus to the latter's recall, at the least expense in lack of peace and quiet.[73]

Ideally the place chosen will, all on its own, really "take the interviewee back". In addition it is to be hoped that, by the time they get around to recording their discussions, the interviewer and interviewee will have sufficient rapport so that the interviewer will prove, if not a positive aid in stimulating his subject's recall, then at least not a distraction from that process. The interviewee should be not only fully informed of and agreeable to the means of recording to be used in the interview sessions, but at ease enough with the note-

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taking, tape-recording or whatever, that it will not distract him unduly.[74] For anxiety in the interview situation, whether engendered by the interviewer, the recorder or the topic of conversation, is not generally conducive to accurate recall.[75] While familiarisation has been found to minimise if not entirely overcome the interview subject's anxiety on the first two counts (that is, on account of the interviewer and the recorder), there is little that can be done about any discomfiture due to the topic being discussed, other than to make the fact of that discomfiture clear (in explanatory notes if it is not apparent enough in the record of the interview itself) so that anyone consulting the record can take that fact into account when deciding what to make of the testimony. One might expect that anxiety due to the topic of discussion would be a problem in medical, psychiatric and perhaps journalistic interviews, but not in oral history interviews, because the latter deal for the most part in "closed cases", matters that are over and done with for the interview subject. This is so to some extent, of course; but for many an interview subject, certain cases are never quite closed, some issues never quite dead ones for him, as long as he lives. And changes in the climate of opinion can render certain outlooks or activities first controversial, then uncontroversial, or first laudable, then laughable, over and over again. So whether a given topic makes a particular interview subject uneasy may well

depend largely on when one discusses it with him.[76]

The timing of an interview, i.e. whether it takes place near to or at a greater distance from the time of the events to be discussed, can have a marked effect on the nature, if not necessarily on the validity, of the testimony given. That is to say, one may get roughly the same story either sooner or later, but it would almost certainly be given in different terms "sooner" than it would "later". Generally, the smaller the time interval between an event and a witness' recollection of it in an interview, the less change there will have been in that witness' frame of reference:

> If you get to him soon after [the event] happens, he still gives you the values, assumptions, attitudes, and viewpoints of the man he was at the time these things happened. For example [in the JFK oral history project] I interviewed John Bailey, Chairman of the National Committee, about a month after the assassination. He was still John Kennedy's Chairman of the Democratic National Committee. I came back a year later and did another interview. He was a different man. Take the Truman people. A lot of them, before 1952, were White House staff people. By 1964, they had been Washington attorneys or businessmen or whatnot for twelve years and they were looking back on themselves the way we look back, in some cases, on our childhood.[77]

But this does not mean that one necessarily gets more or better information in testimony given immediately after, than one does in testimony given long after an event. While on the one hand it is pointed out that

> memories . . . become fuzzy and modified by the context of later life and by the reading the subject has done. An interview five or twenty years later is likely to repeat what everyone knows, or worse yet, to repeat as fresh and personal memory what the subject actually read in someone's book;[78]

on the other hand it is argued that

> it is virtually impossible to get meaningful memoirs from an individual without critical questioning by an historian and this, in turn, is impossible until the historian has been able to go through the files, documents and other manuscripts related to the issue. This will take considerable time, but . . . only meaningless eulogy can be obtained without some such critical process of primary research. Simply put, . . . it is not possible to get answers until one knows what questions to ask; one cannot know what questions to ask without seeing the structure of the significant issues, and that knowledge is unavailable until the problem is studied with some maturity.[79]

In fact, "it is easy to get bad, useless, nauseating interviews at both levels. And it takes a great deal of skill and very hard work to get good ones either way."[80] Both extremes of viewpoint probably arose more from disillusionment than from positive conviction.

> One may well be tempted to say that they are probably both correct and that the whole approach ought to be abandoned as a well meant, but expensive and dangerously unproductive approach to history.
>
> However, future historians would regret such a counsel of dispair. Significant and effective interviews <u>have</u> been made [--and from <u>both</u> vantage points --"sooner" and "later"].[81]

Undoubtedly one gets more in the nature of "engagé" testimony "sooner", and more reflective testimony "later"; but immediacy and involvement will bias an account just as surely as will distance and detachment, if in different ways--so who is to say, for once and all, which is to be preferred?[82]

> And we cannot really make a choice between ["sooner" and "later"] because the issue is not simply one of time. It is partly also a matter of the skill of the interviewer, the nature of the incidents or material to be remembered, and the amount of material to be recalled. If we want fresh, photographic word pictures, or exact recall of conversations, we had

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> better ask soon. If we want the reconstruction of a policy development done with the aid of the man's files and records, we may have to wait until later. If we are dealing [for instance] with a person close to the [U.S.] President who has mines of potential material to be recalled, we had better go to him soon and stay with him long and we had better go to him armed as best we can from the newspapers and magazines to help him sort out one incident from another. If we wait too long, the innumerable conferences with the President may merge into one, the specific items etched against time fuse off into generalized impressions. On the other hand, people who had only one contact with the President might well be left for a considerable time. They are not likely to forget; the experience was important enough for them so that they may remember it in some detail, although they may, of course, magnify and stretch things with time.[83]

Even if there were theoretically a "best time" to interview certain people on a particular topic, the theory could not always be put into practice, for,

> in actuality we shall lack the resources at any given moment to "do" even those which most participants would agree could properly be "done" at once; and we shall have to make priorities in terms of the availability of men, their age, the risk of losing them, their willingness to be interviewed . . ., priorities established in ways which have practically no bearing upon the concerns of [those who argue about the "best time" to do an interview].[84]

Oral history interviews consciously create historical source material. Historical sources provide, or are supposed to provide, data from which historians can infer "what was" and "what happened", from which historians can construct "true stories about the past". So those who support the gathering of oral history testimony and those who use oral history documents may well be concerned with the "truth" of the testimony contained in these documents. The question is often put, somewhat unfairly, as:

"How do you know if the informant is telling the truth?"[85]

Unfairly, because:

> It assumes that there is invariably some basic underlying attitude or opinion that a person is firmly committed to, i.e., his real belief. And it implies that if we can just develop shrewd enough interviewing techniques, we can make him "spill the beans" and reveal what this basic attitude really is.[86]

But in fact,

> informants can and do hold conflicting sentiments at one time and they hold varying sentiments [and remember different things] according to the situation in which they find themselves. . . . The interview itself is a social situation, so the researcher must also consider how this situation may influence the expression of sentiments and the reporting of events. With such considerations in mind, the researcher will not ask himself, "How do I know if the informant is telling the truth?" Instead, the researcher will ask, "What do the informant's statements reveal about his feelings and perceptions and what inferences can be made from them about the actual environment or events he has experienced?"[87]

"Relevance" is perhaps a more manageable and useful criterion than "truth" for judging whether oral history testimony is worth using as source material in any particular inquiry.[88]

> Granted [the] argument that the interviewee tells some sort of truth about himself when he tells us anything at all--that is he gives us true data about something if we but have the wit to interpret it--granted even the correctness of a statement by an obscure eighteenth-century Swiss proto-sociologist to the effect that "men chatter through their fingertips even when they are silent with their tongues"--nevertheless the particular data which is being given us may be irrelevant.[89]

Whether any particular oral testimony is "true" or not, in any of the many senses of that word, is quite beside the point if that material tells us nothing about "what was" and "what happened". And no historical inquirer worth his

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salt will have much difficulty deciding which sources tell him something and which do not. As to what the apparently relevant sources tell him, i.e. what he ought to make of them, the inquirer is not necessarily in any better or any worse a predicament with oral sources than with others. For instance, there is about as great a risk of perversity amongst givers of oral testimony as amongst other conscious contributors to the historical record--that is to say some chance, but probably nowhere near fifty-fifty! Proportionately very few oral history interviewees have any deep need or desire to dupe their interviewers or to create a tissue of lies. Most, when they understand what sort of testimony is wanted from them, either do their best to give it, or simply decline to give it at all.[90]

Anyone who consults oral history documents in the course of an historical inquiry should, however, be aware of the distortions to which even the most honest testimony is vulnerable, distortions which, if they are too severe, could render that testimony invalid or "irrelevant" as a source. There is a tendency, for example, for some people's memories of what they thought and did in a particular situation in the past to conform to some currently accepted standard of what one ought to think or do in that situation.[91] And if such vague forces as "climate of opinion" can distort an interviewee's memory, then all the more so can the importunate interviewer: it is quite possible, for example, that an interviewer who presses too

hard for descriptive detail might cause some interviewees to remember things they never observed--in effect, to enter spurious details into the record.[92] In addition, a whole host of "idiosyncratic factors"[93]--the weather, something that just happened, the interviewer's appearance, or whatever--could have an influence on what an interviewee will be disposed to recall, and what colouring or emphasis these recollections will have, when he gives them as testimony in a particular interview situation.

Anyone who has thought much about this kind of source material or dealt with it soon realises that, alas, it is no perfect pipeline to the past: "I was once under the impression," someone said at an oral history conference, "that in oral history we are documenting events and developments in the past. Clearly, what we are documenting is not the past; we're documenting what is said in the interview."[94] The oral history document is, at best, only "what the philosophers call a 'memory claim'--one person's claim to what occurred. It is up to the historian to decide [on the basis of internal and any available external evidence] whether this memory claim is valid and to what degree it should be given significance."[95] Yet historians and others (in the law courts, in medicine, etc.) need not shun interview material in the course of their work, despite the possibility of fraudulence and the probability of distortion in the information they may derive from this source. Sometimes, indeed, it is their only possible

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source; and even if it were not, the fact remains that they have found out a great deal from some interviews--enough so that the practice of resorting to them is not likely to be given up.

If those who gather and use oral history material must settle for less than "the whole truth and nothing but the truth" as far as its content is concerned, they must also settle for less than a polished and concise style of delivery. As a rule, "people just do not talk simply and economically."[96] Generally, too much conciseness and polish in oral history testimony suggests not freshly revived memories but a rehearsed and refined "story"--and while the latter may be no better or worse than the former as an account of past events, it is a fact that the material in the "story" has come up for review, and thus for possible revision, more often than material in the long-dormant memory. So,

> in every case it is important to ask the witness about the frequency of release, the number of times he told the story before the interview. Every time a story is told, it becomes more crystallized, more of a "story" than a witness account. For instance, a witness of an accident questioned four or five times by police, reporters, etc., soon starts using whole sentences over and over again. On the other hand, if an event witnessed was practically never told, time may have obliterated part of the memory, exactly because the material was not organized enough to be kept memorized easily.[97]

Of course, just as one sometimes gets more information (useful or otherwise) than one bargained for, so occasionally with "style": many gatherers of oral testimony have remarked on the great articulateness or eloquence

of some of their informants.[98] Researchers who later consult any oral history record, when they are attempting to judge its validity for their particular purposes, must certainly be wary of any apparent glibness they find, just as they must be wary of anything implausible. But just as they must apply the implausibility test with caution, for "sometimes the implausible does happen,"[99] so they must take care not to make any hasty assumptions about what an impressive delivery implies: a genuinely knowledgeable interview subject, provided that he is reasonably at ease in the interview situation, can occasionally express himself very fluently, even if he is quite unrehearsed.

This discussion of interviewing for historical purposes has dealt mainly with the factors involved in gathering one kind of oral testimony: spoken reminiscences, or "personal recollections". But it should not close without at least brief mention of another kind of spoken testimony: oral tradition, or "material about the period of time before the memory of men still living."[100] Just about everyone alive has a stock of personal memories he could relate, and each individual is the sole authority on his own personal experience. Just about everybody also carries with him some traditional knowledge he could impart, that is, some hearsay about "what was" and "what happened" in the past. But wherever written records of such happenings have been kept, oral accounts of them are superfluous or worse as historical sources. Oral tradi-

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tion is more likely to contain reliable historical data where it is the vehicle of cultural and historical tradition, which is to say mainly in non-literate societies, and perhaps in some non-literate sub-groups--those off the beaten paths of power and influence--within literate societies. The historian of such groups as these may find their oral traditions a valuable source indeed.[101]

There are two classes of oral tradition, as distinguished by their style of presentation, and consequently by the approaches that must be used in obtaining them for the historical record.[102] Informal oral traditions, the more plentiful kind, are those in which "the ideas and information have been passed down from an earlier generation, but the words and structure of the narration have not."[103] Such material may be obtained in much the same way as testimony about personal recollections, that is, by means of interviews. Formal traditions, which are a scarce commodity even amongst people who possess a relative wealth of oral tradition, are testimonies that are "often memorized and recited word for word, or nearly so."[104] To obtain such material from an informant, one does not "interview" him in the usual sense; rather, one hears him out to the end of his recitation. Formal oral traditions do not lend themselves to being altered on the spur of the moment, so if one can "locate the authentic sources--and then . . . persuade them to talk for the tape recorder,"[105] one has a reasonable chance of obtaining

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full and authorised versions. But formal oral traditions are often replete with obscure allusions and archaic language, often beyond the understanding of most people in the group to whom the tradition belongs, let alone anyone from outside that group. The historian-collector would be remiss in his duties to himself and to future scholars if he did not try to get on record, in addition to the "text" of any such tradition, as full an explanation of its contents as his informant can supply. In obtaining such explanations, he is again in a conventional interview situation vis-à-vis his informant, with all the influences on the quality of questions asked and answers given which that situation implies: the influences of specific time and place, and of the interpersonal relationship between interviewer and interviewee.

E. PHYSICAL NATURE OF THE ORAL HISTORY DOCUMENT

If the overriding concern of an oral history project is genuinely to provide "fresh source material for the world of scholarship,"[106] then it cannot afford to be too restrictive about the form which that material should take, or the means whereby it is obtained:

> Word seems to get around that we have absolutely filiopiestistic [sic] regard for tape recorders. I think oral history people should be concerned about creating source material that otherwise wouldn't exist. And it doesn't matter a great deal [how this is done].[107]

If a subject's oral testimony may be had only through recording the lectures he gives, for example, or only

through unrecorded conversations which an interviewer will subsequently report on in more or less detail, then it must be taken thus or not at all. Occasionally a subject may choose to reflect on whatever the oral history project has asked him about, and give his testimony in writing; while material so given is not oral testimony, it has been elicited by a similar process and is bound to be quite similar in nature to oral history material. The director of Columbia's Oral History Research Office recalled that:

> Some time ago I wrote to Lewis Mumford to ask if he'd give us his recollections of Alfred Harcourt; we were doing, I explained, a special project on this very notable but little-known figure in the publishing world. Mr. Mumford had known him well. Would he give our interviewer a few hours the next time he came to New York? Indeed, he would not, said Mr. Mumford in a tart letter. He would not waste his time talking to one of those accursed machines! What was more worthless than talk? Our methods were, as he understood them, the height of folly. Why, he could write all he knew of Alfred Harcourt, and he knew him well, in half the time, and do it properly. Easy solution: "Dear Mr. Mumford, Please do what you said you could do." We got back eighteen pages of splendid narration. All right, it's not oral history, but it happens to belong in our collection of memoirs about Alfred Harcourt, and those memoirs are oral history. So what shall we do? Put a little asterisk in the catalog and say that it isn't oral history; he wrote it? On the other hand, it wouldn't exist but for the initiative of the Oral History Office. It's new information. I don't care, personally, and I doubt if, secretly, many of you do, if you read it, whether it was tape recorded or not; especially if you can check the introduction and see that the man wrote it.[108]

Still, the vast preponderance of what any oral history project or programme obtains is in the form of interview material, and on tape. These voice-recordings may be retained permanently, either as the sole oral his-

tory document or as back-up for a transcription, or they may be erased in part or in whole after a transcript or summary ("digest") of their contents has been made. There has been much debate on the matter of whether the tapes should be erased. "The very thought has habitually chilled the atmosphere among those who classify the tape as the primary record, the transcript as secondary."[109] There is of course no point in keeping records of such poor quality as to be an unfaithful representation of either the sound or sense of the original;[110] nor those that are too attenuated, those for which "the ratio of tape time to usable data is very low."[111] And if for any reason a promise has been made to destroy the voice-record after it is transcribed, such promise must be kept:

> One wishes to maintain the maximum of material for future historical use; but if a program gets the reputation of having saved items which the subject wished destroyed, it will soon lose the confidence and the patronage of new subjects and be out of business. Whatever is done must be clear and must involve no deception.[112]

But generally, when substance and sound quality warrant, the tapes should be kept; and it is better, where space and other such mundane considerations permit, to err on the side of keeping too many rather than too few.[113]

Obtaining the conditions necessary for proper storage of tapes is certainly no problem: these are routinely available in the libraries and archives with which oral history projects are so frequently associated. When one beholds the frail tape one cannot but be skeptical,

even though it is true that "the original objection that the tapes would deteriorate has been largely turned aside by technological developments."[114] Furthermore, "audio engineers insist that the ferric oxide coating on magnetic tape permanently retains the sound impulses recorded upon it and continues to reproduce the original quality of the recorded sound," which would mean that it is a reliable archival medium.[115] Only time will prove the point one way or the other; those who lack faith may have the last word, but meanwhile they are paying a high price:

> The sound archives of the British Broadcasting Corporation has adopted the procedure of re-recording all its archival holdings on steel discs. Since this is a highly technical and expensive procedure, it has not been universally followed. For instance, the Library of Congress has chosen to re-record on magnetic tape--a far simpler and less expensive method.[116]

The tapes themselves may be a stable and inexpensive medium, but the taped record is still very difficult to "get at"--both for its creators to review, and for later researchers to use. So it is primarily to facilitate such checking and research use that transcripts of the taped records are made, and not to free the tapes for re-use. Indeed, transcribing oral history interviews into typescript is such a costly, time-consuming and exacting process that no programme which can afford it can credibly plead economic necessity as a reason for wiping out the original voice-recordings. The director of Columbia's Oral History Research Office explains, in a mock interview, why his programme and some others like it have

nevertheless routinely erased their tapes:

> Q: I believe I've been told that all of your tapes are transcribed into typescript?
> A: Yes. The tapes, except for fragments that we save, are erased and re-used. This horrifies psychologists with their interest in speech slips and inflection. But a major reason for not preserving the tapes is that we permit each memoirist to edit his transcript, for errors. It's important that he have a chance to correct it. If he goes to that trouble, he doesn't want the first draft--and that's what the tape is--to survive. Besides, scholars would rather have matters in black and white and know that the memoirist has read over what he said.[117]

But anyone running across an ambiguity in a Columbia oral history transcript must surely regret the programme's extreme procedure of erasing the entire interview, and wonder whether it was really necessary when, as far as most oral history authors would have been concerned,

> the major issue involves editing. Only when a security matter or a personal matter of importance has been removed from the transcription is there really a serious question. In such a case, the relevant section of the tape may have to be erased. But every effort should be made to retain the bulk of it [not just a "fragment" or sample]. The reasons are self-evident. The sound itself, that is, the voice, is a significant historic document . . . . Furthermore, the nuances, pauses, inflections, the way a thing is said, may often give a special meaning which does not appear in a typewritten copy. One may say, "That's a fine thing!", meaning, either that it is good, or that it is bad. The difference, all crucial in this case, lies simply in the inflection of the word "fine." And this is a difference one cannot render on a typewriter.[118]

While the Columbia method is not unreasonable, and indeed shows a keen awareness of the drawbacks of the taped record, it also reflects an indifference to the unique qualities of that record which is characteristic of programmes of its vintage. It is entirely possible that other simi-

larly early oral history projects may have retained their interviews on tape only because they could not afford to transcribe them immediately, and not because their awareness of the unique value of "audible documents" was any keener than Columbia's. Attitudes have definitely changed on that score since the early 1950's, and procedures accordingly.[119] Erasure of the tapes no longer necessarily follows upon even the most painstakingly careful transcription, for it is more and more widely held that "no transcription or digest is ever perfect. The spoken word expresses feelings which can never be put down on paper."[120]

Still, transcripts, if they can be done and done well, are very much to be desired. For even the most substantive interview on tape is difficult for its "coauthors" to review for points to correct or clarify, and for all but the most patient or leisurely of researchers to delve into. And by no means all oral history interviews can be described as pithy: "many tape-recorded interviews based on question and answer are rambling, ill-informed, and tedious beyond belief for any later listener."[121] The contents of oral history interviews, pithy and smoothly articulate or otherwise, are much more readily accessible to researchers in transcribed form than on reels of audio tape, so the typescript is much more likely to be consulted. (Remember that, to libraries and archives of all kinds, healthy statistics on use of their collections are a matter of some importance!) Another benefit of tran-

scription is that it encourages close checking of taped materials: the very process entails a word by word review of the tape recording, which can expose points in need of correction or clarification in the original interview. Whether editing of this or any other sort should be done, though, is a matter of some debate:

> There are those who feel that any editing is tampering with the recorded word, and others who maintain that no one, no matter how literate, is capable of recording an entire interview without letting drop an ambiguity or a misnomer here and there, and that to leave them in is a disservice to the interviewee and to those who use the transcripts.[122]

By no means every error or omission is a "telling" one, and quite possibly there is more to be lost than gained by letting such things go unremedied. But transcript editing of a more substantial nature than this, whether undertaken by the interview subject himself or by personnel of the sponsoring oral history programme, should be kept to a minimum. After all, "the proper role of oral history is [simply] to build critically produced primary sources . . . and not [for instance] to provide a machinery for a kind of oral autobiography controlled by the subject;"[123] nor to turn out research material packaged neatly according to topics or main themes as identified by the programme personnel. Still, anxiety about risking the interview subject's displeasure, and about causing difficulties for future researchers, moves some oral history programmes routinely to edit transcripts.[124] Says the head of the Regional Oral History Office of the Bancroft Library, Uni-

versity of California, Berkeley:

> we edit our transcripts before returning them to the interviewee for his approval. This step gives us an opportunity to organize the material; this is the more essential since we do not hold the interviewee to a strict order during the interviews (we guide, but we do not push), and without this editing, the interviews might end up as a scramble which could be embarrassing to the interviewee and difficult for the user to follow.[125]

When a transcribed interview or part thereof is to be published, one can see the point of such editing; but one wonders at the necessity for it in an archival document (which is what most oral history transcripts are--no more and no less), when division into chapters according to interview session and provision of a good index would likely satisfy both interview subject and future researcher, all without altering the original sequence in which the interview material was given--something which is vastly more worth preserving than the occasional grammatical or factual slip. A typed transcript lends itself easily to correction and emendation (i.e. interpolation of first names, locations, and other such information as would assist later readers in understanding the testimony, but which were not given by the author in the course of his narration). The tape recording definitely does not lend itself to such modification, though if it is not to be transcribed within a reasonable time, it should have been reviewed anyway, and a sort of "erratum sheet", keyed somehow to the material on the tape, prepared for the benefit of later listeners. Any project or programme which

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does not somehow fulfil this responsibility, regardless of the kind of oral history documents it seeks to produce (whether tapes or transcripts or both) can justifiably be reproached for fostering the creation of "half-baked" historical source material.

But if the process of transcription can lead to the discovery of errors and ambiguities in oral testimony as originally recorded, it can also introduce new errors into the written version it produces. It is, after all, a process whereby a fallible human being listens to a voice-recording and sets its contents down in writing:

> The transcriber sits wreathed in earphones and attached in a tangle of cords to tape recorder on one side and typewriter in front for as many hours as schedule demands and . . . nervous system permits. Under such circumstances hilarious bloopers sneak through the typewriter keys.[126]

For example, after surveying the performance of transcribers of some interviews on a project about collections of rare books in California, Ruth Teiser concluded that:

> They are called transcribers but occasionally they are transformers, so that a flat-bed becomes a flattened press and books are hand-eliminated. Perhaps they are having us on, these typists who put the tape-recorded word on paper . . . for their variations are rarely dull.
> . . . . [For example] the rare early Grabhorn volume, The Laugh of Christ and Other Original Linnets, became They Laughed at Christ and 13 Other Original Limericks . . . . The "mere connoisseurs" they created turned out to be the Americana Series.[127]

And "one secretary, in transcribing a tape, wrote 'liar' for 'lawyer,' a grave error. Another wrote 'Maple Leaf Rag' [a Scott Joplin composition] as 'Make Believe Rag' [plausible, but not what the author of the memoir said.]"[128]

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Even when transcribing can be done very soon after recording, and by a person as knowledgeable about and intimately involved in the project as the interviewer himself, there is still some margin for error. And when, as is frequently the case, transcribing must be done by people not as knowledgeable and intimately involved as that, the margin for error is much greater.

Some people simply are not adept at hearing tape recorded conversation and rendering it accurately on paper. Even the best of those who are able to do so will occasionally be confronted with a tape on which "a memoirist who is lucid, even eloquent, [is] often drowned by impromptu hazards such as garbage trucks, pneumatic hammers, or pipe-tapping on the microphone for emphasis."[129] --Which incidentally brings to mind another issue: that of transcribing non-verbal sounds and inflections, at least where these bear on the meaning of what is said (and who is to judge which do and which do not?). In this matter it is probably better to err on the side of too little rather than too much. Attempts at faithful representation of the entire audible document in print only involve the transcriber in endless onomatopoeia and editorial asides. And this kind of effort is hardly worthwhile when, as likely as not, the "total picture" would be lost on anyone trying to read the transcript anyway, for such "scripts" simply do not "read well". On the contrary, they spite what a good transcript does best, which is to display what

testimony was given in an interview or recitation. Nothing can equal the "audible document" itself as a representation of how the testimony was given. Transcripts should therefore be made "suitable for scanning"--as uncluttered as possible, and as accurate an account of the words spoken as careful checking by the oral history interviewer and/or interviewee (i.e. the "coauthors") can assure.

> All of the literature on oral history seems to assume a verbatim transcription, leaving out street noises, ahems, and operational fumblings, but getting all the substantive words intact and including punctuation which clarifies the meaning. How simple--and naive! I cannot yet isolate the qualities that make a good transcriber, but how I wish someone would devise a simple exercise to test for them. They seem to include a broad background knowledge, an empathy with people, a sense of the relevant, a proficiency in spelling and punctuation, and perhaps a physiological factor--the ability to hear electronic sound reproduction. Whatever the qualities are, they are hard to come by. In our office all editing and checking are done by the interviewer, who is, we trust, in tune with the interviewee; thus we have some assurance that we are getting the interviewee's meaning down correctly.[130]

Even for oral history programmes that are more than adequately financed, the production of good transcripts is no easy accomplishment!

> Studies of the use of oral history over the last decade have shown time and time again that transcripts edited by their oral authors, rather than tapes, are what scholars want.[131]

Perhaps understandably, considering the extra investment that goes into transcripts, and considering their more conventional format, collections of oral history transcripts have been better publicised in the scholarly community than have collections of oral history tapes. "Louis

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M. Starr of Columbia notes that scholars never ask for the tapes. The reason may well be that . . . it has not been generally known that they were available."[132] The written version of the oral history document may indeed be quite sufficient for the purposes of most researchers. But just as there are some instances in historical work where, say, an original paper document is so much more worth consulting than any printed version that the scholar will go to considerable trouble to see it, so in some cases the "audible document" will be worth the time and trouble to listen to, though a transcript has been made (and may indeed have been, like the printed version of a written document, the scholar's introduction to that source).

Scholars will make more valid use of any source at their disposal, be it an original document, facsimile, or abstract (non-exact copies, transcripts and digests would fall into this last category), if they understand something of how it came about, and consequently what its biases are; that is, if they know who had a hand in creating the document and by what means it achieved the form available to them. In the case of oral history documents, these details, so important to proper interpretation, are seldom clear or easily guessed at from the documents themselves. So while it is the responsibility of the researcher to equip himself with a general understanding of the nature of oral history documents if he is going to use this kind of source material, it is the responsibility of

the creators and custodians of this source material to furnish background information on every particular oral history document, be it in written or audible form. In the case of an oral history tape or "audible document", then, valid research use will require both that the scholar understand what recording devices in general can and cannot capture, and that he consult such "documentation of the document" as has been provided, to discover what the particular tape in question represents and misrepresents about the original situation recorded. A trivial example may serve to illustrate the point here as well as it has in several other instances above: The researcher should know that microphones can be very sensitive to sharp sounds such as clocks ticking; he must therefore stop to consider, when listening to the tape of an old memoirist who was recorded in his living room, whether the ticking of the grandfather's clock really dominated that setting to the extent it would appear from the tape, or whether in fact the microphone (even if it was not badly placed) simply "noticed" that sound more than people would do. The documentation accompanying the tape, that is, an accounting of the circumstances of its creation, which has been provided or ought to have been provided by those who made it (the only ones in a position to know those circumstances), can clarify this and any number of more significant issues. Similarly, in the case of a transcript of an oral history tape, valid research use will require an

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understanding of what transcription in general can and cannot embody of original voice-recordings, and what the particular transcript in question included and excluded; what kinds of editing and how much were done, and by whom. Again, to find out these things, the researcher must have access to documentation of the process by which the transcript came to be as he finds it.

## F. DOCUMENTATION AND FINDING AIDS

> Any oral history project owes to the historian of the future enough briefing about the nature and circumstances of the interview so that he will not, in good faith but out of ignorance, misuse or misinterpret it.[133]

Very often an oral history document requires "annotation to render the recording [or transcript] fully comprehensible to those who hear [or read] it out of its own context in time and place."[134] Without this, the tape or transcript is only a "fragment", and like any other fragment it may be tantalising, but it must forever remain somewhat dubious as historical source material--that is, less specifically useful than data whose origins or "provenance" is better known.

Later users of the document will want at least sketchy information on most of the journalistic "w's" (who? what? when? where? why?) concerning it. Granted there is usually some internal evidence of these matters in the oral history document; that is to say, one will usually find some, if not all, of this information revealed in the course of the interview itself. But while this would be a

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most gratifying discovery to scholars who have already delved into the document, it is of no help to anyone trying to decide whether or not to do so. Therefore,

> [the oral history document] should be prefaced by:
>
> 1) a clear, brief identification of both the subject and his importance, his dates, and other hard-core biographical data, and of the interviewer and his credentials.
>
> 2) a clear indication of where and when and how the interview took place.[135]

These are essentially "matters of fact" which are very straightforward both for the creators of an oral history document to state, and for later users to interpret. This is also the bare minimum of information that should accompany any oral history document.

Of course there could be much more. It is probably impossible to "over-document" such material. The oral history interviewer might well furnish

> a statement . . . indicating as clearly as possible the context and atmosphere of the interview. The reader [or listener] ought to be able to tell from this whether the interview was a cooperative or difficult one, whether it took place on a plane, in the subject's office, or on his back porch of an evening; whether it was uninterrupted or constantly interrupted by business; whether the interviewer consciously decided not to ask certain kinds of questions, and whether the subject refused to deal with certain kinds of issues; whether it was heavily or lightly edited and by whom; in generaly [sic] whether the interviewer was satisfied or whether he would think it worthwhile for someone else to try again. Finally, the reader out [sic] to know those special and exotic little incidents which sometimes throw serious question on what appears at first glance to have been a valuable tape. If the subject's wife was constantly interrupting; if the tape was incessantly turned off while the subject told the "real story" preparatory to figuring out the careful dodge which he then recorded on tape; if the subject constantly referred

> for answers to an aide, if the congenial interview gradually fuzzed off into an alcoholic bull-session, the historian of the future has a right to know.[136]

Care must of course be taken in the wording of such statements as these. Putting them in "secret files" is not a good idea. Perhaps the administrative file on an oral history document, especially a tape, will prove the most convenient place to keep any notes on the "context and atmosphere" of the original interview-and-recording session. But an "introduction", attached to the other written data on an oral history document if it is a tape, or to the document itself if it is a transcript, is really the best place for such commentary. Essentially any observation or judgement an oral history interviewer can responsibly make can be phrased in such a way as to get his intended message across to future users of the interview in question, without embarrassing or insulting the interviewee involved, should the latter ever see the interviewer's written remarks about him and about their conversations. It is a moot point whether such commentary is crucial in all cases to proper interpretation of an oral history document. It can more easily be done without than the basic "matters of fact" referred to earlier, but no doubt it more often helps than hinders future scholars to whom it is available. Still, those who use any oral history document must inevitably draw their own conclusions about its nature and validity from their own "reading" of its contents, "and their conclusions may be more

accurate than the interviewer's because of greater retrospective knowledge, perhaps, or new information."[137]

Only very seldom does historical inquiry involve exhaustive study of entire documents, or of entire collections of documents. More often it involves partial use of many sources. Research of the latter sort depends very heavily on "finding aids", or guides to the contents and organisation of archival material. It is the responsibility of custodians of this material to prepare such guides as are necessary to the research community they serve.

Researchers will want to know whether, and if so, where in a particular document or collection of documents, they might find data of interest to them. They will therefore require a description of every document or group of documents, at least to the extent of "subjects covered, in approximate order".[138] These descriptions need not be elaborate; indeed the simpler they can be and still communicate anything at all, the better they will serve the needs of the researcher. A convenient time to prepare the descriptive summary or "table of contents" for an oral history document is while that document--tape or transcript--is being reviewed for intelligibility and accuracy, prior to being salted away in a collection. Since a summary or table of contents cannot always be so contrived as to mention every name, place and topic that came up in any particular interview, it is also worthwhile,

when the record is being reviewed, to make a running list of these--not every last one of them, but certainly those about which there is "some real information" in the tape or transcript.[139] Such lists may be made into indexes for each individual document, or may be compiled into a master index for a whole collection, if it becomes large enough to warrant one. Since researchers want to know where as well as whether they can find the information they require, some means has to be found to specify the location of every item mentioned in a summary, table of contents, or index. For material in oral history transcripts, as for any manuscript or printed material, there is no problem: locations can be stated precisely, according to page or range of pages. But there is no equally exact way to specify the location of any item in an oral history document on tape. Number-and-side-of-reel is too crude an indication, as one side of a seven-inch reel can carry half an hour or more of recitation, interview material or whatever. Every item in the summary, table of contents or index for any one reel can and should be keyed to either the tape footage or playing time elapsed at the point where that item is to be found.[140] If the figures given for time or tape footage are neither as consistent nor as convenient as page numbers for indicating just where certain information is to be found, they are just as good an indication as any--and certainly better than no indication at all--of the extent of that information.[141]

> The . . . . job of making oral history interviews available to researchers is not completed when the sought-for information has been captured on tape or transcript and has been indexed for easy use. The bottleneck has always been that persons doing research and writing have no means of knowing what rich resources on their topic might exist in the oral history collections of historical societies or libraries.[142]

The custodians of oral history documents, just like all other custodians of historical source material, must decide what constituency they can reasonably serve, and then do their best to cultivate it.

> One modest way to publicize the existence of oral history materials is to exchange information with other similar historical materials centers, both those in the region (for regional historians) and those that emphasize the same subjects (i.e. agriculture, maritime history, crafts, etc.). This can be done by sending out lists of the oral history accessions for the year with a brief listing of the subjects covered in each interview, and by requesting other institutions to send their lists in return. Such lists can be kept on file and made available to researchers who come in.[143]

Wider exposure, if desired, may be gained through the periodical or special publications of appropriate regional, national and international historical societies, archivists' associations, and the like.[144]

## G. ETHICS AND LEGALITIES

The creators of oral history documents can avoid much later confusion and grief for themselves and others by paying adequate heed to the ethical and legal implications of what they are doing. Since the purpose uppermost in their minds is to contribute to the present and future store of information about the past, they may feel, usual-

ly with some justification, that their efforts in that direction will have no immediate consequences worth worrying about, either for themselves or anyone else. But in fact the accomplishment of their ultimate purpose necessarily involves their communicating and recording the desired information; and depending on what information is communicated (by the interviewee) or caused to be communicated (by the interviewer and any sponsoring agency) for the oral history record, and on how and when that record comes to light, there might indeed be immediate consequences--famé and fortune, perhaps, or embarrassment and expense. So the creators of an oral history document should make arrangements for its custody and use that will provide for (or against) these eventualities, i.e., that will take into account their own interests and the interests of anyone discussed in the document, as well as the interests of future users of the document.

Whenever it will make no particular difference to the lives of the creators of an oral history document, or to the lives of those discussed in the document, its contents should be made available for research use immediately upon its completion. This best serves the interests of future users, who are always in favour of having as much data as possible at their disposal. But there is good reason, in some instances, for deferring the fulfilment of this obligation to the research community. The giver of oral history testimony may feel that certain

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recollections he has--perhaps about business dealings, interpersonal relationships, or his own hopes and dreams--are worth preserving for the information of future scholars, but should not be publicised immediately because to do so would be at least personally embarrassing or callously inconsiderate of others who are still living out their lives, if not downright unethical or illegal. Businesses, professions and individuals have their codes of ethics, written and unwritten, and every jurisdiction has its laws and customs concerning defamation, invasion of privacy, sedition and so forth. While formal sanctions for transgressing these are already rare and becoming more so, accusations of such transgression are not unheard of, and mere accusation can be costly in terms of lost reputation for anyone or everyone implicated.[145] So if the interviewee, interviewer, or anyone else involved in the production of an oral history document sees reason to fear legal reprisals or accusations of indiscretion for revealing anything contained in the document, he should not hesitate to recommend that the entire document or the sensitive parts be closed for a period of time, or that access to the document be restricted.[146] Whatever restrictions are decided upon, "they should be clear; they should be self-implementing (not depending upon further action by obscure parties like heirs of the third generation), and they should be limited to the absolute minimum."[147] One does not want to be accused of hoarding material unnecess-

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arily, any more than one wants to be accused of trifling with sensitive material!

Even the most straightforward and reasonable provisions for immediate or eventual use of oral history documents will be impossible to carry out as agreed, if suitable custodians for these documents cannot be found. Archival institutions are by far the best choice. They have the physical facilities to preserve materials entrusted to them, and to make these available to researchers; and their personnel have an established reputation as reliable custodians.

> Many . . . prefer, or insist upon, a grant of complete ownership to the center [which is to be custodian of the oral history document]. This simplifies control in the interest of both scholar and center, and may serve the interests of the donor by carrying the restrictions he has dictated. Thus, a memoir may be owned by the National Archives, but the Archives may be required by the grantor to keep it secret for twenty-five years, or to refuse access to it to anyone except professional scholars. This device places all responsibility on the center involved or on its personnel.
>
> Other centers prefer to leave the ownership with the subject and his heirs. This can produce immensely complicated permission situations, and while it may protect the center from full responsibility it may also create an ambiguity in the question of responsibility. If the transcript [or tape] is owned by X, and made available to a scholar by the center, is x [sic] or the center responsible for the dissemination of certain libelous information therein, or are both?[148]

There is little to be lost and much to be gained, in most cases, by granting full ownership of an oral history document to its custodian, be this an archives or whatever--provided of course that the creators of the document, in effect its "authors", can trust the custodian to adhere to

the terms of any agreement made on future use of the document, and to handle responsibly any eventualities that these terms do not cover. For an archival institution, the problems this involves are "not very different from those already faced effectively and with good taste in the handling of private manuscript collections by government archives."[149]

Generally it is understood and agreed among all involved in the creation and preservation of an oral history document that its contents are meant for research use; but occasionally the document or a part of it will turn out to be publishable:

> If it is planned to use any substantial portion of an interview in a public way, say in a newspaper or a historical monument pamphlet, it is only common courtesy to ask the narrator for his permission before using it. He will probably be pleased. But if he doesn't want it used, no matter how generous he has been in signing over all rights . . ., do not use it. Nothing will damage an oral history program as much as a disgruntled narrator who feels his material has been used improperly.[150]

## H. PUBLISHED USE OF ORAL HISTORY MATERIALS

Not all oral history documents will find application immediately upon being made available to the research community. But neither have they been produced with that particular expectation in mind, though of course the hope of eventual acknowledgement is implicit in their having been produced at all. Yet the fact remains that only through published use of their contents can oral history documents be vindicated--or otherwise--as the histor-

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ical source materials they were intended to be.

Individuals and institutions who have fostered the creation of oral history material, especially those who plan to continue doing so, would therefore do well to get at least some of their material used as soon as possible. Favourable reactions to the material from researchers and the general public will be most heartening to the programme personnel. And unfavourable reactions will perhaps suggest where improvements can be made in the way the programme obtains and handles oral history documents. There are several ways to achieve at least minimal exposure for one's oral history holdings. Perhaps someone will use them right away for historical research, the results of which are to be published in some form. Or the programme itself can undertake, or encourage others to undertake, such ventures as the publication of excerpts from its collection on themes of current interest, or the production of lectures, slide presentations, or museum displays using "quotations" from oral history tapes or transcripts.[151]

In fact a fair amount of oral history testimony has come to the attention of researchers and the general public, whether as a result of the promotional genius of certain oral history programmes, or of the resourcefulness of certain historians either in finding their own way to oral history repositories, or in gathering their own oral history material.[152] Some oral history documents have

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already proven substantive enough to withstand repeated and critical use as sources for respectable publications of both scholarly and general interest.[153] Others have fared less well, at least as narratives of events, when they were finally given some exposure; but even these oral history documents usually retain a certain validity as portraits of their narrators.[154]

The researcher is not averse to puzzling over his sources, sometimes at length, in order to draw out what he wants from them. However the audience for published material--be this in written or oral form--quite properly expects not to have to go to the same trouble to get its meaning. Very seldom, therefore, will a document that is perfectly worthy as archival material be equally worthy as published material. This is as true for an oral history document, on tape or transcribed, as it is for any written document. Usually the meaning a researcher draws from his sources, and which he wishes to convey to an audience through some kind of publication, is best communicated in his own words. But occasionally it will suit his purposes to have his sources "speak with their own voices" at greater or lesser length. Ironically, the record of these voices must almost always be revised, "edited and shaped", rather than copied exactly for written or oral publication, in order to convey to a reading or listening audience the "immediate, . . . authentic impact" which the words naturally had when they were originally spoken, and

which the later researcher usually feels only after steeping himself in the oral history document which is the surviving evidence of those words.[155]

Both oral history documents themselves and the publications based on them have variously dismayed or impressed, depending of course on their quality, however one judges that--but depending, too, on the expectations of the researchers or audiences involved. What some have condemned as the inaccurate or inconsequential "reminiscences of garrulous old men", others have considered to be mines of useful information, if not necessarily dazzling prose fit to be published as is.[156]

NOTES TO CHAPTER VI

1 Starr, "Columbia's Reservoir," p. 2.

2 See Starr, "Oral History: 25th Anniversary Report," for particulars. The prestige of its oral history collection is such that Columbia was chosen to be the repository of Khrushchev's taped memoirs (see "A Letter from the Publisher," Time (Canada Edition), vol. 103, no. 11 (18 March 1974), p. 9; and "Khrushchev's Last Testament: Power and Peace," no. 18 (6 May 1974), pp. 30-39, cont'd in no. 19 (13 May 1974), pp. 58-62. These are excerpts from the memoirs; an introduction precedes the first instalment.).

3 Rollins, "Voice," p. 518.

4 See introductory remarks by Louis M. Starr, pp. 3-6, and programme descriptions throughout, in Gary L. Shumway, comp., Oral History in the United States: a Directory, New York, The Oral History Association, 1971 (hereafter cited as: Shumway, Directory), 120 pp.

5 This is most graphically illustrated in Manfred J. Waserman, comp., Bibliography on Oral History, New York, Oral History Association, 1971 (hereafter cited as: Waserman, Bibliography), 40 pp., where publications are listed according to the year in which they appeared. It is also described in Schippers, "Literature," Colloq II, pp. 33-40. Some examples of "public discussion and debate" are: "Is Oral History Really Worthwhile?" in Clifford L. Lord, ed., Ideas in Conflict: a Colloquium on Certain Problems in Historical Society Work in the United States and Canada, Harrisburg, Pa., AASLH, 1958, pp. 17-57 (hereafter cited as: "Is Oral History Worthwhile?"); four articles in The American Archivist, vol. 28 (January 1965), pp. 53-83; "Oral History in Africa"; an "Oral History Symposium" in Wilson Library Bulletin, vol. 40 (March 1966), pp. 599-628; and published proceedings of the first four annual colloquia of the American Oral History Association.

6 The Oral History Association in the United States was formed in 1966-67. The Canadian Oral History Association/ Société canadienne d'histoire orale has just been formed in 1974-75. Its proposed constitution states that: "This educational non-profit association is formed to:
a) encourage and support the creation and preservation of sound recordings which document the history and culture of Canada
b) develop standards of excellence and increase competence in the field of aural/oral history through study, education and research
c) work with and support any other association or institu-

tion whose objectives are consistent with those of the association." (Canadian Oral History Association Bulletin, vol. 1, no. 1 (March 1975), p. 4.).

7 "Scholars were slow in learning to use the available material. However, this reluctance was in part a problem of critical mass. By [the 1960's] enough chronicles had been amassed for word to spread that Columbia possessed a body of materials well worth the expense and time of a trip to [its oral history collection]." (Rollins, "Voice," pp. 518-19.) "Twenty Selected Books Incorporating Oral History Material," in Waserman, Bibliography, pp. 27-31, lists American publications using oral history material obtained in various ways, but more often by the writers themselves than from an established oral history programme such as Columbia's. Barry Broadfoot (Ten Lost Years) is a writer on Canadian subjects who has used oral history material gathered by himself; Victor Hoar (The Mackenzie-Papineau Battalion) used some interviews that had already been done, and did some more of his own.

8 Vaughn D. Bornet, "Oral History Can Be Worthwhile," p. 253. Bornet's emphasis.

9 A failure to make any distinction between, say, large and small projects is at the root of many such disputes. By now there seems to be generally less anxiety about the oral history idea being accepted, and there are correspondingly fewer polemics on "the one true way" to earn oral history the support and respect it requires to survive, let alone prosper. Both "eternal questions" and pigheaded polemics about oral history become tedious if carried too far, but they have had a certain value as vehicles for the airing of much practical wisdom and experience (see "Is Oral History Worthwhile?" and OHA Colloquia referred to in note 5 above).

A. EARLY COMMENTARY ON ORAL HISTORY

10 "A sizeable percentage of the articles on [oral history] are mixtures of promotional enthusiasm and outright bilge." (Maynard Brichford, Scientific and Technological Documentation: Archival Evaluation & Processing of University Records Relating to Science & Technology, Urbana, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 1969, p. 34.) Rather too harsh and sweeping a statement to be taken completely seriously, but unfortunately it cannot be passed off entirely as a reviewer's "cheap shot": "It is not necessary to agree with this strong indictment in order to show concern as to what prompted the conclusion," remarks bibliographer Waserman, p. iv.

11 This paper was unavailable to me, but the article "A

New Measure of Things Past," American Archivist, vol. 18 (April 1955), pp. 123-32, by the same author (hereafter cited as: Bombard, "New Measure") seems to be a restatement.

12 Schippers, "Literature," Colloq II, p. 34.

13 Bombard, "New Measure," p. 124.

14 Ibid., p. 125. My emphasis.

15 Ibid., pp. 129-30.

16 Ibid., p. 132.

17 Schippers, loc. cit.

18 Bornet, "Oral History Can Be Worthwhile," p. 241. The book referred to is Allan Nevins, Ford: the Times, the Man, the Company, New York, Scribner, 1954.

19 Bornet, "Oral History Can Be Worthwhile," p. 253. Bornet's emphasis.

20 Ibid., pp. 247-54. Also presented in "Is Oral History Worthwhile?" pp. 24-28.

21 Bornet, "Oral History Can Be Worthwhile," p. 252.

22 Ibid., p. 247. Bornet's emphasis.

23 Schippers, loc. cit.

24 Bornet, loc. cit.

B. OBJECTIVES

25 See Shumway, Directory; also "Oral History and Sound Archives in Canada," The Canadian Archivist, vol. 2 no. 2 (1971), pp. 52-70; and "Directory of Canadian Oral History," Reynoldston Research and Studies Publication, vol. 2, no. 2 (1973), pp. 34-52. Many archival institutions produce oral history records themselves, or sponsor such work, on an ad hoc basis, though they have no formally constituted "oral history division". The Provincial Archives of Alberta has obtained part of its collection by this process (see APPENDIX IV); so has the Public Archives of Canada, Historical Sound Recordings Division (see La Clare, "Historical Sound Recordings," pp. 4, 13).

26 "Most programs scrounge along with hidden subsidies from the universities, business firms or libraries which

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house them, constantly aware that the cost accountants may some day turn them out." (Rollins, "Voice," p. 519.)

27 From "Goals and Guidelines" adopted by the OHA (see APPENDIX V for full text of these), as quoted by Amelia R. Fry and Willa Baum, "A Janus Look at Oral History," American Archivist, vol. 32, no. 4 (1969) (hereafter cited as: Fry and Baum, "A Janus Look"), p. 323.

The often similar and complementary nature of oral history and archival work is discussed in Rollins, Report, pp. 39-49 (chapters 8, "Costs," and 9, "Management): "Probably the most disadvantageous situation [both economically and functionally] is for an oral history project to stand alone." (p. 48.) James B. Rhoads (then Archivist of the United States), in "Comments on the Third Colloquium," pp. 179-185 in Gould Colman, ed., The Third National Colloquium on Oral History, New York, OHA, 1969 (hereafter cited as: Colloq III), said that "oral history must be considered an archival process. What we are concerned with is the creation, preservation, and use by others of an additional type of record of important events and activities. This record, ideally, differs from the more traditional kinds of paper records only in the format used, the circumstances leading to its creation, and to a certain extent, in the areas of human activity it seeks to document. As archivists, therefore, we feel it is quite natural to move into oral history activities because our training, experience, and professional standards are quite appropriate to this work."

The term "altruistic" has frequently been used or implied in describing the intentions of oral history work; a recent example is Leo La Clare, in his address "Directions," at the Canadian Aural/Oral History Conference, 18 October 1974.

28 For example, the project connected with the George C. Marshall biography. It is described by its initiator, Forrest C. Pogue, in "Education of a Biographer," D.C. Libraries, vol. 36 (Fall 1965), pp. 70-76; "Oral History Program," George C. Marshall Research Library Newsletter, vol. 5, no. 1 (1966), [4 pp]; and "The George C. Marshall Oral History Program," Wilson Library Bulletin, vol. 40, no. 7 (March 1966), pp. 607-15: "Every library that houses manuscripts pertaining to living figures or to those whose former associates still live should count their collections incomplete unless they make an effort to add a tape-recorded file to the written and printed materials. If nothing more it will add a breath of life to the stacks of static papers." (p. 615.)

29 Fry and Baum, "A Janus Look." The point is given a great deal of emphasis throughout the article by Curtin, "Collecting Oral Data."

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30 Barry Broadfoot, chronicler of the Canadian experience of economic depression in the 'Thirties, and of the Second World War, could not have kept a complete record of the testimonies he obtained, without betraying the trust of those who had given them to him. He had, as he put it, "to protect the guilty." (Ten Lost Years, 1929-1939: Memories of Canadians who Survived the Depression, Don Mills, Ont., Paperjacks, 1975 (c1973) (hereafter cited as: Broadfoot, Ten Lost Years), p. 1.) But lack of sufficient time and money, rather than an urgent need to protect confidences, is what most often militates against a researcher's preparing and preserving his "raw material" as archives for possible use by others. See APPENDIX VI (on the Indian Association of Alberta's Treaty and Aboriginal Rights Research) for a description of a project that is keenly aware of the broader value of the testimonies it is obtaining, though its scope and facilities may preclude its establishing its own archives. T.A.R.R. will perhaps entrust the Provincial Archives of Alberta with its recordings (same arrangement as the Oblate Missionaries have for care of their records), when its immediate tasks are accomplished. Many researchers simply cannot be bothered with such "responsibilities", though few indeed would admit to being against the idea in principle.

31 Material produced by individuals or groups in the course of research or publicity campaigns comprises a larger or smaller part of most oral history or historical sound collections in archives. Public archives certainly accept material of this sort when it is offered, and undertake to prepare the indexes, etc., that are necessary for effective use of these sources.

La Clare, "Historical Sound Recordings," pp. 2-4, describes PAC acquisitions: "Recordings are acquired from both public and private sources; the public sources being the departments and other agencies of the federal government and the private sources being individuals, corporations, institutions and associations of national significance . . . . Most government agencies have not yet created any great quantities of sound recordings as public documents; the few sound recordings which have been produced were created mostly for public relations purposes. . . . In the private sector, as for the public sector, sound recordings from individuals, corporations, institutions and associations have been produced for public relations purposes. As you would expect, the major collective source of sound recordings consists of the media agencies such as the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation and the National Film Board in the public sector and the radio and television stations as well as the disc and film producers in the private sector.

"With regard to oral history interviews, the Historical Sound Recordings Section serves more as a collector and curator of recorded interviews rather than as a creator of

recorded interviews. Our first priority is to acquire and preserve oral history interviews which have already been recorded as research documents for theses, articles, books, films and radio programs, because these interviews often have research value beyond the immediate publication." (Specific examples of these are given on pp. 14-18 of the same essay.)

The collection of former broadcaster Imbert Orchard has been acquired by Aural History, PABC, and forms a significant part of its present holdings (see "Aural History, Provincial Archives of British Columbia," [Victoria], October 1974, p. [4].).

32 The Oral History Association in the United States holds a workshop in connection with its annual convention; the Historical Sound Recordings Division of the PAC, and Aural History, PABC have conducted regional workshops. A "Conference on Tape Recording" at the Provincial Museum and Archives of Alberta in 1972 drew together people from around the province who were variously engaged in broadcasting, folklore, ethnomusicology, and oral history work. Such workshops as these are attended by people already involved in oral history projects, and by those planning to undertake them; and they are, necessarily, "short courses". Recently a few summer-long and full-session university courses have been instituted, the main aim of which is to turn out "practitioners" trained in all phases of oral history work (see Charles T. Morrissey, Saul Benison and James V. Mink, in the panel discussion "Oral History in the Classroom," Colloq III, pp. 41-60; also Starr, "Oral History: 25th Anniversary Report," pp. 7-8; and Richard D. Curtiss, et al., A Guide for Oral History Programs, California State University, Fullerton, Oral History Program, and the Southern California Local History Council, 1973, pp. 45-52, 97-99.).

33 A famous example at the school level is the project which resulted in the "Foxfire" publications. In The Foxfire Book, pp. 9-14, and Foxfire 2, pp. 8-17, editor Eliot Wigginton tells about the workings of the project in Rabun Gap, Ga., and the philosophy behind it. (These books were published in Garden City, N.Y., by Anchor Press/Doubleday, in 1972 and 1973 respectively. A publisher's note on p. [4] of the latter says that "Eliot Wigginton . . . . is currently working to extend the Foxfire concept of education and oral history to other communities.") Training courses such as those mentioned in the previous note may also be used as exercises in understanding and appreciating history, or historical and archival methodology. A seminar on "providing Aural/Oral History Material for Primary and Secondary Education," at the Canadian Aural/Oral History Conference, Simon Fraser University, 18 October 1974, provided the forum for a description and assess-

ment of various B.C. school and college projects in "heritage appreciation" through oral history work. See also George L. Cook, "Aural History in the Classroom: the Columbia River Treaty Lecture Series," Sound Heritage, vol. 3, no. 3 (1974), pp. 25-32. (In this article Cook says there is a danger that students will learn only "'that's-what-I-always-thought' history" (p. 25) from experience with oral history in the classroom. I doubt whether the danger, though real enough, is greater with this educational device than with any other. The results in every instance depend on how intelligently the device is used--by teachers and students alike.)

34 Tyrrell, "Tape-Recording Local History," pp. [6-7].

C. SCOPE AND APPROACHES

35 Oral history work at the Archives of the Rocky Mountains in Banff concentrates on a geographic area, any subject touching on it being fair game. Examples of projects defined by subject area would be those on political leaders or labour movements, etc. Very often both kinds of limits are used: there are any number of projects and programmes concentrating on a region's pioneers, or those of a profession, for instance.

36 Quotation is from Margot P. Liberty, in a panel discussion, "Interdisciplinary Views on Oral History," Colloq III, p. 28. See also Nathan Reingold, "A Critic Looks at Oral History," pp. 213-227 in Gould P. Colman, ed., The Fourth National Colloquium on Oral History, New York, OHA, 1970 (hereafter cited as: Colloq IV).

37 Schippers, "Literature," Colloq II, p. 39.

38 Ibid., pp. 38-39. Rollins, Report, pp. 12-13, remarks that: "There has been much concern in recent years, among political scientists and others interested in political dynamics, with the process of decision-making and with the nature of leadership. Oral history may help us delineate both more clearly. Thus it has been suggested that the Kennedy Oral History Project might concentrate upon certain "prototypal" decisions. Might not such concentrated research throw more light upon the processes involved than would generalized attempts to interview all the people or cover all the conferences?

"The problem is that both leadership and decision-making are abstract conceptions which weave together specific facts in a web of hypothesis and generalization. The very concept of where to look for "decision-making" and what to identify as its contributing elements is a product of a basic psychological view. The whole approach presumes

that decisions are made by an identifiable process which, with minimal variations, is repeated frequently. Yet there are occasions on which decisions are not made at all; then the non-decision produces results. And at other times, the "decision-maker" finds himself in a position only to understand and accept the decisions already made for him by events.

"If we are to avoid the crudest self-deception which might come with the recording of oral history in the tight framework of some preconceived notion of leadership or decision-making, we had better step back a bit. Indubitably, the job of the oral historian is not to identify a pattern or even to look for it. His job is simply to provide richer primary sources, to unveil the raw data, to produce a broader recall of the situation. . . . It becomes the job of the theoretician to use the raw data so provided in order to see whether meaningful patterns occur."

39 Aristide R. Zolberg, "A Preliminary Guide for Interviews," in "Oral History in Africa," p. 3.

40 Schippers, "Literature," Colloq II, p. 38.

41 Ibid., p. 39.

42 Louis M. Starr, in a panel discussion, "Definitions of Oral History," in Elizabeth I. Dixon and James V. Mink, eds., Oral History at Arrowhead: Proceedings of the First National Colloquium on Oral History, Los Angeles, Calif., Oral History Association, Inc., 1967 (hereafter cited as: Colloq I), p. 22.

43 No such guidance is possible without adequate preparation on the part of the interviewer; without it he cannot know what to ask the interviewee, what will prod his memory, or take him back into a past situation (see Rollins, Report, pp. 9, 11-14; also "The Art of Interviewing," in Colloq III, pp. 124-187, passim, for discussion of the need for preparation on the part of the interviewer).

44 Allan Nevins, quoting Sean O'Faolain, an essayist on the art of autobiography, in an address, "The Uses of Oral History," Colloq I, p. 32. In Rollins, Report, p. 4, the remark is made that: "There is no avoiding the role of the historian [in the oral history process] unless we leave ourselves completely at the mercy of the subject's motivation, his spontaneous recall, his sense of propriety and importance. At his worst, the historian can be dangerous; given the power to shape the evidence, he may misshape it. But at his best, he can by critical questioning guide his subject through a re-examination of the past."

45 Rollins, "Voice," p. 519.

D. INTERVIEWING

46 Dexter, Interviewing, p. 136.

47 "Research demands . . . balancing strategies and tactics in light of overall purposes, both theoretic and practical. . . .

". . . Interviewing is the preferred tactic of data collection when in fact it appears likely that it will get better data or more data or data at less cost than other tactics! The implications of this suggestion, however obvious, are not always followed out; for at a particular time, in particular disciplines, certain research techniques will be in fashion. They will be used, therefore, unreflectively and sometimes inappropriately." (Ibid., p. 11. Dexter's emphasis.)

48 Dexter says that, like sociologist David Riesman, "'I am not happy with the term "elite" with its connotations of superiority. Yet I have found no other term that is shorthand for the point I want to make, namely that people in important or exposed positions may require VIP interviewing treatment on topics which relate to their importance or exposure.' Indeed the only other terms frequently used in the literature are more confusing--'nonstandardized' or 'exploratory' or 'journalistic.'" (Ibid., p. 5. He quotes Riesman from Abundance for What? and Other Essays, Garden City, N.Y., Doubleday, 1964, p. 528, n. 16.)

49 Dexter, Interviewing, pp. 5-6.

50 Ibid., p. 24. Still, those looking for practical advice and examples can find plenty of them in the literature on oral history or interviewing generally. See, for instance, the set of "Tips for Interviewers," in Baum, Oral History, pp. 32-35.

51 "At this point, it may be well to consider the problem of the so-called common-sense approach. That is, the argument that interviewing technique cannot and perhaps even ought not to be taught. The proponent of this view holds that interviewing is within the realm of ordinary social experience, with basic skills already held to some degree by all persons--to a large degree by talented persons--that extra skills are within reach by experience, and that teaching of interviewing is unnecessary and even futile. It will be stated that interviewing has had universal application for a long time and in many ways in industry, social sciences, case work, and other researches, all without benefit of special techniques. However, in my estimation, this is not particularly true. I think techniques have been evolved, perhaps studied and taught, maybe not necessarily very formally, maybe not documented but largely by perceptorship, which is, incidentally, the way

psychoanalytic and psychiatric techniques are still taught--largely by perceptorship." (Albert W. Kandelin, in panel discussion, "Techniques in Oral History Interviewing" (hereafter cited as: "Interviewing Techniques"), Colloq I, p. 61.)

52 Charles T. Morrissey, in "Interviewing Techniques," Colloq I, pp. 48-49.

53 "There are . . . two types of persons who should not be assigned to interviewing. They are the compulsive talker, and the compulsive director. Both types will end up with interviews of themselves. The compulsive talker will do most of the talking, in the guise of lengthy questions or comments between brief yeses or noes of the narrator. The compulsive director will be able to guide the narrator into telling what the interviewer thinks is the appropriate account, much to the later dissatisfaction of the narrator and the non-validity of the historical information." (Baum, Oral History, p. 30.) For one of the many rundowns of the qualities of a good interviewer, see Langlois, Manual, pp. 5-6.

54 See Dexter, Interviewing, pp. 24-28, on this point.

55 By a "person to person" interaction, I mean one that is without the usual recourse on either or both sides to manipulative techniques, role-playing, game-playing, etc.--there are all too many ways to describe an absence of this kind of interaction! Martin Buber, in I and Thou (trans. Ronald Gregor Smith, Edinburgh, T. & T. Clark, 1937), characterises the situation thus: "The relation to the Thou is direct. No system of ideas, no foreknowledge, and no fancy intervene between I and Thou. . . . No aim, no lust, and no anticipation intervene between I and Thou. . . . Every means is an obstacle. Only when every means has collapsed does the meeting come about." (pp. 11-12.)

Humanistic psychologists such as Carl Rogers, and the "games theorist" Eric Berne, praise this kind of interaction, but describe it only very diffusely in their writings. My "label" for the phenomenon comes from the title of a collection of essays edited by Carl Rogers and Barry Stevens, Person to Person: the Problem of Being Human, New York, Pocket Books, 1971 (c1967), but I can find no single passage in that book or any other of Rogers' writings which explains "person to person" interaction more succinctly or less mystically than does Buber's I-Thou. The following passage from the conclusion, "After Games, What?" in Eric Berne, Games People Play, New York, Grove Press, Inc., 1967 (c1964), p. 184, may clarify what is involved: "For certain fortunate people there is something which transcends all classifications of behavoir, and that is awareness; something which rises above the programming

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of the past, and that is spontaneity; and something that is more rewarding than games, and that is intimacy. But all three of these may be frightening and even perilous to the unprepared."

It goes without saying that the minimum condition for "person to person" interaction, in the interview situation as in any other, is an atmosphere of mutuality and trust--and that this takes some time to develop.

56 Dexter, Interviewing, p. 39. Dexter's emphasis.

57 James A. Robinson, "Editor's Foreword," in Dexter, Interviewing, p. xii.

58 Dexter, Interviewing, p. 75.

59 Rollins, Report, pp. 43-44.

60 Baum, Oral History, pp. 11, 23.

61 Rollins, Report, p. 43.

62 Rollins, "Voice," p. 520. Rollins' emphasis.

63 Dexter, Interviewing, p. 37.

64 Ibid., pp. 37-38. Dexter's emphasis.

65 Rollins, Report, p. 9. My emphasis.

66 Ibid., pp. 13-14. Rollins' emphasis.

67 W. Wheeler, sociologist, in panel discussion, "Interdisciplinary Views on Oral History" (hereafter cited as: "Interdisciplinary Views"), Colloq III, p.33.

68 point made by Walter Lord, in the course of an address, "Oral History and the Modern Historian," Colloq III, pp. 4-17.

69 Wheeler, in "Interdisciplinary Views," Colloq III, pp. 32-33, and Dexter, Interviewing, pp. 31-32, discuss implications of the interviewee's being either overly impressed or scornful of the interviewer's apparent preparedness (or lack thereof), of his social status, and so forth. Some of these problems can be avoided or remedied, some cannot; and where they cannot, either no interview at all or a useless interview is the probable result.

70 Jan Vansina, "The Documentary Interview," in "Oral History in Africa," p. 9.

71 See APPENDIX VII for an extended excerpt of Vansina's

article, which discusses the information needed for "critical analysis", and how such information can be supplied.

72 Dexter, Interviewing, p. 48 (attributes phrase quoted to Kenneth Burke, Attitudes toward History, 2d rev. ed., Boston, Beacon Press paperback, 1961, p. 446). On this point, see also J. Siegman, sociologist, in "Interdisciplinary Views," Colloq III, pp. 25-26.

73 See Dexter, Interviewing, pp. 46-49, for discussion of this issue of "place".

74 On the issue of tape recording, and the variety of ways in which interview subjects react to it, see J. Siegman, "Interdisciplinary Views," Colloq III, pp. 23-24; also Curtin, "Collecting Oral Data," especially pp. 370-71.

75 This and several other thought-provoking observations are made in a discussion by David P. Musto and Saul Benison, "Studies on the Accuracy of Oral Interviews" (hereafter cited as: "Accuracy"), Colloq IV, pp. 167-181.

76 Dexter, Interviewing, p. 151, mentions an instance "in which it would have been quite impossible for any interviewer to avoid arousing uncertainties, a sense of being threatened, resentment on the part of some interviewee"--the instance being a project to interview some literary figures "in the 1950's about their leftist activities in the 1930's"!

77 Morrissey, in "Interviewing Techniques," Colloq I, pp. 67-68.

78 Rollins, Report, p. 36.

79 Loc. cit.

80 Rollins, Report, p. 37.

81 Loc. cit. Rollins' emphasis.

82 Schlesinger, "Contemporary History," pp. 73-74.

83 Rollins, Report, p. 37.

84 Ibid., pp. 37-38.

85 This is the title of an article by John P. Dean and William Foote White, "reprinted by permission from Human Organization, vol. XVII, no. 2, (1958)," which comprises part of Chapter V, "What Kind of Truth Do You Get?" in Dexter, Interviewing.

86 Dean and White, in Dexter, Interviewing, p. 119. Their emphasis.

87 Dean and White, in Dexter, p. 131.

88 "The traditional canon of historical scholarship is clear and universally accepted in the profession: every relevant source must be taken into account, but no source is to be accepted uncritically. . . . In regard to any kind of evidence, the rule is: if it exists, it must be consulted. The operative word here is 'consulted'. No source has to be used, but all must be examined to see whether they can yield any evidence to help solve the problem at hand." (Curtin, "Collecting Oral Data," p. 368. Curtin's emphasis.)

89 Dexter, Interviewing, p. 134.

90 --Well, perhaps not quite so "simply", as Louis M. Starr explains in his mock interview, "History, Warm," p. 28:

"Q: . . . Tell me, do many prospects turn you down?

A: More often they put us off; and I think there's a hidden reason for this. Most persons are flattered to be asked--after all, the implication is that you've got something to say that is worth preserving. But there is a psychological barrier to be cleared: the prospect may infer that we are saying to him, 'You've led your life, now tell us about it.' Absurd as it may seem, a good many subjects cry 'Tomorrow!' as if to postpone what sounds like a Day of Reckoning. For many of them, doing this testament may be, in itself, the most important contribution they can make to their fellow men, but the postponers think of it as a last testament, so they beg off, again and again. I suppose they're the same ones who die intestate.

Q: It's not because they're busy men?

A: Of course they're busy. But some of the busiest men alive have devoted hour after hour to these memoirs . . . . The chronic postponers are more than busy, they're just a little afraid. A flat refusal is comparatively rare."

91 See David Musto in "Accuracy," Colloq IV, pp. 173-76.

92 Considering how desirable "detail" is as a quality in historical source material of any kind, one can understand the inclination of the historian-interviewer to press for it. Journalists find themselves under the same pressure as oral history interviewees to give details. They may knowingly or unknowingly "lie" to satisfy the demand (see William Manchester, "Some Personal Meditations on Oral History," Colloq III, p. 64). The "implausibility test" will not necessarily expose this sort of thing, as spurious details can be quite plausible (they may therefore still

tell the historian something, but they are no less spurious on that account). Unless premeditated lying is involved, the giving of spurious details can be regarded as a minor form of "ingratiation", on which matter Lewis Dexter comments that, in the interview situation, "the interviewee may be regarded as playing two games--one involving the satisfaction of expressing his own views, etc., is the information-giving game; the other, that of 'establishing rapport' with the interviewer, [is] the ingratiation game. . . . To the extent that, for whatever reason, the latter becomes dominant, it will become very much harder--and often impossible -- to get relevant data on any subjects except those bearing on the interviewee's notion of appropriateness, courtesy, friendliness, and ingratiation. . . .

". . . There is one other situation which, though it may contain elements of ingratiation, goes well beyond it. Like the strains of bacteria that have learned to be resistant to antibiotics, interviewees in certain social groups . . . have learned to be interviewed. Like Kluckhohn's Navajo informant who said 'I don't know; let's see what the published anthropological works, hidden behind the curtain in my hogan, say,' they no longer reply with information from experience, but with the kind of information which, previous interviewers have taught them, is desired. In view of the fact that the whole schooling system tends to teach people to give 'the right answers' as seen by teachers and textbooks, it is quite natural that many interviewees in our society should be predisposed to learn the right answers in early interviews (or from classroom study of social sciences) and then regurgitate them for the benefit of later interviewers." (See Interviewing, pp. 136-37.)

93 Dean and White, in Dexter, Interviewing, p. 123.

94 Gould Colman, in discussion following address by Nathan Reingold, "A Critic Looks at Oral History," Colloq IV, p. 224.

95 Musto, "Accuracy," Colloq IV, p. 176.

96 Barry Broadfoot, Ten Lost Years, p. vi.

97 Vansina, "Documentary Interview," p. 11. Vansina's emphasis.

98 Examples of this in settlement pioneers and history professors respectively, are given on pp. 21 and 91, Colloq III. The articulateness or eloquence of a witness can be due as much to his "knowing what he is talking about" as to his having "the gift of the gab"; though whether the witness is already familiar with interview-and-recording sessions, or has been adequately familiarised with them in

earlier meetings with the interviewer, will undoubtedly also affect the "style" of his testimony. Says anthropologist Margot P. Liberty ("Interdisciplinary Views," Colloq III, p. 31): "I don't think very many people who have not had years of public experience are able to carry on in a normal [let alone exemplary] fashion when something is stuffed into their mouth that they're supposed to tell the ultimate truth to. So technique [on the part of the interviewer] is important in getting worhtwhile material to begin with, and not dozens of hours of nothing."

99 Dean and White, in Dexter, Interviewing, p. 127.

100 Curtin, "Collecting Oral Data," p. 373.

101 See Fisher, "Western Canada's Indians." David W. Cohen concluded an address, "A Field Study of Traditional African History," Colloq IV, p. 97, with the following remarks on the nature and validity of oral tradition as historical source material: "We of course know less about the initiator of a particular oral tradition relating an event eight generations back than we do about the diarist recording in ink his observations of an event of 1750. The page in the diarist's notebook survives, not so much as a result of his wisdom, but rather as a consequence of the favorable physical composition of the paper on which he recorded his observations. Similarly, the oral tradition may have within it a substance, a meaning, a value, a purpose, which causes it to be preserved and transmitted from generation to generation without marked change. The tradition may record a marriage, or deed, or testament, or judicial decision, or contribution of a family to some event of importance, or religious duty, or political obligation. These are vital facts. It is from such tradition that man comes to reckon his place in his family, in his community, in his society: his rights, his responsibilities, his laws, his debts, his assets. They are vital and no important detail can be forgotten. If one attempts to discard some detail of importance, his neighbor, his brother, his client, or his patron surely will not forget it. [Any tradition of literal or symbolic importance] 'becomes like a stone and is not forgotten.'"

102 "Field techniques differ with the type of material to be recorded, and for this purpose oral data for history can be divided into three broad categories: formal traditions, informal traditions, and personal recollections." (Curtin, "Collecting Oral Data," p. 371. The salient features and special problems of each category in turn are discussed on pp. 371-77.)

103 Curtin, "Collecting Oral Data," p. 373. He comments further on the quantity and quality of informal oral tradi-

tion (p. 374): "If a society has had a rich body of formal traditions, everyone will be able to give some account of them, just as everyone in Western society will know a little history. Virtually everyone will also have some memory of family lore, at least back to a 'grandfather' depth in time. Many people will have specialized knowledge about former culture, about the way things were done in the past. The very informality of these memories leaves them open to rambling and disjointed narration, in contrast to the tight organization often found in formal traditions. Only semi-formal narrations like village histories, informal genealogies, or migration stories tend to be condensed."

104 Curtin, "Collecting Oral Data," p. 371. "This class of tradition consists of narrations that approach the qualities of a written work of history or literature. They are often memorized and recited word for word, or nearly so. Far from being bodies of raw data, they are, in effect, compositions, prepared by someone in the past for his own purposes. As such, they have many characteristics of a secondary historical account that has to be considered a primary source simply because its own sources are lost. . . . It goes without saying that long formal narrations of this kind are usually preserved and repeated only where a class of professional or semi-professional historians or story-tellers are especially trained to recite them and teach them to younger generations. Other societies, however, will have shorter formal traditions such as tales, poetry, king-lists, or genealogies. These are more likely to be remembered by amateurs.

"The crucial mark of these formal traditions, from the collector's point of view, is the fact that each has its own structure. There is no question of interview technique or other devices to give coherence to a body of data. . . . Nor is there a problem of selecting the material that should be recorded. . . . The quantity of formal, memorized historical tradition of this kind is distinctly limited, though tales with some historical content may be available in greater numbers. As a general guide, however, one can assume that anything having sufficient importance to the society in question to be memorized and preserved as a formal tradition is worth recording. For that matter, an unselected and complete collection of all formal traditions preserved by a particular society can serve as evidence about the way that society regards its own history." (Ibid., pp. 371-72.)

105 Ibid., p. 372.

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E. PHYSICAL NATURE OF THE ORAL HISTORY DOCUMENT

106 Louis M. Starr, in panel discussion, "Definitions," Colloq I, p. 18.

107 Louis M. Starr in discussion of William Manchester, "Some Personal Meditations on Oral History," Colloq III, p. 72.

108 Starr, in "Definitions," Colloq I, p. 17. Starr's emphasis. He gives other examples of unorthodox oral history materials on pp. 15-17.

109 Amelia R. Fry, "Persistent Issues in Oral History," Journal of Library History, vol. 4, no. 3 (1969) (hereafter cited as: Fry, "Persistent Issues"), p. 226.

110 "Of course if the tape is such a poor representation of the voice as to be misleading, it should not be wished upon the future." (Rollins, Report, p. 32.)

111 Curtin, "Collecting Oral Data," p. 374.

112 Rollins, Report, p. 27.

113 Curtin, loc. cit.

114 Rollins, Report, p. 31.

115 La Clare, "Historical Sound Recordings," p. 10.

116 Loc. cit.

117 Starr, "History, Warm," p. 29.

118 Rollins, Report, pp. 31-32.

119 As is the case with any innovation, some of the possibilities of audio tape were grasped more quickly than were others; and some people were quicker than others to broaden their initial outlook: "Back in the dim 40s . . . I began broadcasting 'live' on FM radio, using 78 rpm records plus my own spoken commentary on the music. . . . [This required much studio equipment, technical assistance and rehearsal time.] Then came tape--and I transferred the entire operation 'live' to my own home studio, assistant and all. I had not yet discovered tape editing. I soon did, and in the early 1950s I began doing my own tapes unassisted, via piece-by-piece editing. Yet, do you know, so little did I understand the significance of tape as a permanent record, a document, that I erased all my early shows, in order to use the tape again. Never occurred to me to keep them.

"Fortunately, that didn't last long. I saw the light--

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the very light about which I am writing--and from late 1952 onwards I kept my tapes. I still have most of them, in the hundreds. They are my oral documents, my very life, and I hope they will live awhile after me, perhaps.

"You may not be entirely astonished, then, when I tell you that the great Columbia Oral History, in all its majesty as a branch of a leading American university and associated with the most monumental of college libraries, the Butler Library, erased all its tapes back in the beginning! Why? So they could use the tapes again.

"Columbia University! When I think of the miles of tape thrown out in the average studio today . . . Beyond belief. But they did. I got it by phone and I might be wrong, but as I understand it, they erased, and erased, the entire oral documentation of the project, all the way through until 1961. (That's nine years after I saw the light.)" (Canby, "Audible Document," pp. 18-19. Canby's emphasis.)

120 Richard B. Allen, "The New Orleans Jazz Archive at Tulane," Wilson Library Bulletin, vol. 40, no. 7 (March 1966) (hereafter cited as: Allen, "Jazz Archive"), p. 621.

121 Curtin, "Collecting Oral Data," p. 374.

122 Fry, "Persistent Issues," p. 226.

123 Rollins, Report, pp. 27-28.

124 Ibid., p. 27: "Transcriptions must and should be open to editing by the subject. Although some do it, it seems generally agreed that the interviewer himself should not edit except to weed out transcription errors.

"There is much disagreement on the problem of editing by the subject, closely related as it is to the complicated problem of ownership of the tapes and transcriptions. Professionals divide into two groups on this point: those who insist that the transcript should only contain what the subject wants, on reflection, to say; and those who feel that a major task of the interviewer is to keep the subject from destroying his memoir by well intentioned but corrosive blue-pencilling in transcription.

"Part of the problem is that the editing takes place away from the persuasive influence of the interviewer, and a part of it is that words which sound well frequently look badly on a page. The former group generally insists that the subject must be asked to edit, and that the transcription must then be retyped to remove all signs of editing and all give-aways regarding the original version. The latter group favors a process which will preserve the most in each instance: offer the right to edit only if it is requested; have the interviewer go over the editing with the subject in an attempt to undo as much unwise cutting as possible; retype the transcript and erase the

tape only if the subject requires it. Thus, under many circumstances, unless the subject chose to make a demand, the edited transcript itself as well as the full tape would be available to posterity. In other cases, it might be possible to maximize the saving and at the same time to satisfy the demands of the subject by retyping only crucial pages and by erasing only sections of the tape."

125 Baum, "A Revived Tradition," p. 59.

126 Amelia R. Fry, Introduction to Ruth Teiser, "Transcribers' Fancies," Journal of Library History, vol. 5, no. 2 (1970), p. 182. And not just "bloopers", but quite plausible alternative interpretations of what was originally said can appear in transcriptions, as everyone must know who has ever taken dictations, given "live" or on tape, in a classroom or office. Transcribers are quite humanly disposed to try to make sense out of what they hear, and they do not all or always make the same sense of any given passage. On pp. 463-64 of The Presidential Transcripts (copyright 1974 by the Washington Post Company, and by Dell Publishing Co., Inc.), there is an exchange which has been transcribed twice. Whether this was done by two different transcribers or by the same one at two different sittings is impossible to guess, and is in any case immaterial; what is worth noting, though, is that the two passages, while similar, are by no means identical.

127 Teiser, "Transcribers' Fancies," pp. 182-83.

128 Allen, "Jazz Archive," p. 621.

129 Fry, "Persistent Issues," p. 226.

130 Baum, "A Revived Tradition," p. 61.

131 Louis M. Starr, "Introduction," in Shumway, Directory, p. 4.

132 Rollins, Report, p. 32.

F. DOCUMENTATION AND FINDING AIDS

133 Rollins, Report, p. 31.

134 Curtin, "Collecting Oral Data," p. 371.

135 Rollins, Report, p. 30. See a sample form for recording this and other necessary data on the oral history document, in Baum, Oral History, p. 37.

136 Rollins, Report, p. 30.

137 remark by Albert S. Lyons, an archivist, in Nevins, "Uses of Oral History," Colloq I, p. 30. On pp. 28-30, Nevins interrupts his formal address to discuss, with several of his listeners, the issue of what sorts of observations and judgements an oral history interviewer might make, how he should state these, where they should be kept, and what use they are to future researchers.

138 Baum, Oral History, p. 37. Information on "context and atmosphere" can easily be appended to the kind of data sheet illustrated on this page.

139 "Do not index 'Theodore Roosevelt' if the information is 'I remember as a kid I saw Teddy Roosevelt as he came through our town on a campaign trip. It was quite a thrill to wave at the President of the United States and I was sure he waved back.' The historian looking up fresh information on Theodore Roosevelt will only be irritated to have spent the time to consult that tape. Good indexing requires some discrimination. A complete index may be as useless as it is impressive looking." (Baum, Oral History, p. 38.) In her article "A Revived Tradition," p. 61, Baum quoted Hubert Howe Bancroft (from Literary Industries, in Works of Hubert Howe Bancroft, XXXIX (San Francisco, 1890), p. 242), to make the point that it is "'extremely difficult to make [some] indexers comprehend what to note and what not. Rules for general guidance could be laid down, yet in every instance something must be left to the discretion of the individual. . . . If, for example, the sentence occurred, "The machinery of government had not yet been set in motion along the Sierra foothills," such an indexer would make a card under Machinery, to the infinite disgust of the investigator of mechanical affairs.'"

140 Neither of these measures is entirely satisfactory. Baum, Oral History, p. 36, advocates the use of playing time, rather than tape footage elapsed, because tape footage meters are too unreliable. But if time is a more accurate and consistent measure, it is no more convenient, from the researcher's point of view, as a means for locating any particular passage on a reel of audio tape. How can one find something said to be at the 11-minute mark, for example, except by waiting for the tape to roll, at regular playing speed, for eleven minutes?!

141 Maryalice H. Stewart, of the Archives of the Rocky Mountains in Banff, as guest lecturer on audio-visual materials at the Archives Training Course (Library Science 456), University of Alberta Summer Session, 1973, bemoaned the fact that those who had just gone to all the trouble of listening to the backlog of interview material on tape at the Provincial Archives of Alberta, in order to produce written summaries (synopses) for each tape, had not seen

fit to indicate in any way the approximate location, and therefore the extent, of each of the several topics or items they listed per tape.

142 Baum, Oral History, pp. 38-39.

143 Ibid., p. 39.

144 The custodians of oral history materials who have wanted to advertise their holdings more widely have been glad to be included in national inventories of oral history holdings such as those published by the Oral History Association of the United States, or in Canada by the Oral History Committee, Archives Section, Canadian Historical Association, and by Reynoldston Research and Studies, in the early 1970's. But they rightly question whether special union lists of oral history materials are a very workable answer in the long run; whether these do not serve better as morale-builders for the oral history movement than as tools for historical research! Such catalogues are likely to be consulted only by researchers who already know that it is oral history material they are looking for; such catalogues mean the segregation of oral history listings on any given subject from listings of manuscript sources, of material in sound archives, and so forth, on the same subject. Now the one-stop reference service--the "union catalogue of everything"--may only be a researcher's impossible dream and a bibliographer's impossible task. But oral historians have already campaigned with some success in the U.S. for the integration of oral history listings into a larger and more widely consulted catalogue of source materials: Starr, in his introduction to Shumway, Directory, p. 4, was pleased to announce that "the National Union Catalog of Manuscript Collections, beginning with its 1971 edition, will include oral history collections large enough to meet its criteria."

G. ETHICS AND LEGALITIES

145 Baum, Oral History, pp. 47-48. See also E. Douglas Hamilton, "Oral History and the Law of Libel," Colloq II, pp. 42-56; and H. Mason Welch, "A Lawyer Looks at Oral History," Colloq IV, pp. 183-195.

146 On pp. 42-43 in Oral History, Baum discusses a few of the many possible arrangements, and the relative merits of each.

147 Rollins, Report, p. 28.

148 Loc. cit.

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149 Rollins, Report, p. 29.

150 Baum, Oral History, p. 42.

H. PUBLISHED USE OF ORAL HISTORY MATERIALS

151 Baum, Oral History, pp. 57-58.

152 In fact very few historians find their way to unadvertised oral history repositories; they obtain their own material, or they respond to advertising campaigns. See Chapter IV, note 30, p. 59 above, for mention of some oral history programmes especially noted for their promotional genius.

153 Starr, "Oral History: 25th Anniversary Report," pp. 3, 11-12.

154 See, for example, Francis W. Schruben, "An Even Stranger Death of President Harding," Southern California Quarterly, vol. 19 (March 1966), pp. 57-84, in which the author discusses the results of his inquiry into the accuracy of some statements in an oral history document belonging to the University of California: the reminiscences of Ralph Palmer Merritt (a prominent Californian, d. 1963). Baum, in "A Revived Tradition," p. 63, makes the comment that: "While the researcher was unable to prove or disprove Merritt's statements definitely (and they may still prove to be leads to future evidence), it seems most likely that Merritt inflated the truth. In fact, following the publication of the [Schruben] article, we received a letter from one of Merritt's long-time associates, in which he indicated that on more than one occasion Ralph Merritt had exaggerated his role in an event, much to the embarrassment of the prime participants. Perhaps the greatest significance of the Merritt material is not so much that it presents information relating to [matters such as] the arrangements for Harding's funeral [U.S. President Harding had taken ill during a western tour, and died in California in 1923] as that it reveals the flamboyant braggadocio of a man who played an important role in California's history. We will put this letter into the historical record . . . .

"The moral to be derived from this example is threefold: (1) . . . checking [to the extent that Schruben undertook it] is beyond the financial capacity of an oral history office; (2) this memoir triggered an impressive exercise in historiography--professors charged with the training of graduate students might find similar problems in oral history memoirs on which to 'sick' their students; and (3) use of the memoir and publication of the research resulted in new evidence on the subject."

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155 See commentary on publications in print, in Waserman, Bibliography, p. 28. Barry Truax and others, from the World Soundscape Project at Simon Fraser University, discussed the kinds of editing and artifice necessary to produce publishable soundtracks or "soundscapes" from archival recordings of actual sounds and voices, during a "Sound Programme," at the Canadian Aural/Oral History Conference, Simon Fraser University, 18 October 1974.

156 See "Is Oral History Worthwhile?" pp. 34-40.

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## CHAPTER VII

## ORAL SOURCES AND HISTORICAL STUDIES IN CANADA

The evolution of historical studies, and of the sources on which these studies are based, has been much the same in Canada as in other countries of the western world. The same kinds of efforts and accidents have caused some evidences of our past to be obliterated and others to survive. The same kinds of individual and collective interests have dictated the manner and extent of use of this evidence in historical studies. Still, a consideration of some of the particulars of our own case is by no means out of order.

Written records have been the major source for historical work done in or about Canada. For one thing, more written evidence has survived than any other kind. For another, it has been generated by the very people whose story most historians have been interested in telling; whose story, presumably, the historians' audience has wanted to be told. And written evidence has been the form that most historians could relate to best. The historian's choice of sources to consult, and the questions he puts to them in order to build up a "true story



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of the past", always arise out of his own experience and the experience of contemporaries who matter to him.[1] For a long time, much that historians held to be important and interesting in their own lives and times, and therefore in lives and times past, revolved around the written word. It still does to a large if proportionately lesser degree. Typically, therefore, they have found the "paper-strewn" paths of the past more congenial than those that are strewn with other material.[2] Of course historians have always understood that the written record does not reveal everything they might want to know about those who generated it. They also understand, better now than they once did, that the written record may tell a great deal, if in a biassed way, about people who had no hand in producing the record, but whom the record-makers had dealings with or opinions about. And historians have always drawn upon other sources--artworks, artifacts and traditional lore, not to mention their own and their contemporaries' observations and experiences--whenever they have found these relevant to the stories they were trying to tell. However, evidence from such sources has usually been of peripheral rather than central importance to these stories.

But the nature of historical interest, and the nature of the documentation available--at least for more recent times--have changed. Historians are now less a cozy club in a world of the written word, whose sources, subjects and audience all belong to that world, than was

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once the case. As they have come to know and do more in their own lives without so much reference to the printed page or to written communication, for instance, historians and their audience have become more curious about, and seen more value in, what people in the past knew and did without reference to the printed page or to written communication. All that can be done to satisfy such curiosity about the people in our more distant past is for us to ask new questions of the evidence already on hand--mostly written records and artifacts--because we cannot hope for very much new evidence on the distant past to come to light. But to satisfy such curiosity about people in the more recent past, we can rescue a certain amount of information from "living memory", which has always been a real and rich, if very transient, "record" available to the contemporary historian. We can also go to modern documentation which, if its vastness and complexities can be coped with, can tell us a great deal.

Modern means of documentation such as photography and sound recording have permitted easier and more complete entry into the permanent record of some kinds of evidence--scenes and sounds--that formerly survived only as they could be represented in the writings of observant and articulate memoirists, for instance, or in the works of skilled artists, or in oral traditions. These new means have also documented phenomena that are quite unique to our own time--unique because they are ramifications of

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an unprecedented technology that has made possible, among other things, telecommunications and rapid long-distance travel. The new means of documentation, and new technology generally, have been available in Canada about as soon as they have anywhere. Testimony in old and new forms to the impact of this technology on events, and on the record of events, is already to be found in our institutions of heritage preservation, museums and archives[3]--as well as all around us, because of the fact that it is still largely "contemporary" in nature. Photographic evidence has had the jump on sound recordings, photography having been invented earlier in the nineteenth century, and having become more widely available as a means of documentation earlier in the twentieth century. Many of our archival institutions now have sizeable photographic collections; archivists have evolved techniques of preservation and control for this kind of material; and historians have begun to draw on it for detailed information and illustration, rather than merely for occasional decoration, in their works.[4] Enough time has passed so that some of the earliest photographs can now be regarded as documenting the remoter past--the past before the memory of anyone still living. Sound recording became a possibility slightly later than photography, and has become widely available as a means of documentation only very much later --in fact only in the last two or three decades. Leo La Clare, of the Historical Sound Recordings Division, Public

Archives of Canada, says that:

> Because the phonograph wasn't invented until 1877 and was perfected only in 1888, our recordings document only Canada's contemporary history. Our oldest recording of an actual event is the message addressed on 11 September 1888 to the President and people of the United States by one of our former Governor-Generals, Sir Frederick Arthur Stanley . . . . Incidentally, . . . this is the oldest playable record in the world. We have some eye-witness accounts recorded in the 1950's and 1960's [when recording equipment finally became more manageable in size and price] of events which occurred prior to 1888, such as the arrival of the Royal Canadian Northwest Police [sic] in Saskatchewan in 1874 as recalled by Gabriel Leveillé, a former scout for the Royal Northwest Mounted Police.[5]

Similarly, in the Provincial Archives of Alberta, there are recordings of actual events (radio talks and meetings) from the 1930's, and eyewitness and traditional testimony about events as far back as the third quarter of the nineteenth century.[6] Like photographs--like every other kind of record for that matter--there are, as far as their nature as historical sources is concerned, two categories of sound recordings: those produced contemporaneously with, or even as an integral part of, the events they document; and those produced after the fact. No great numbers of either kind of "audible document" could be created, either by amateurs or professionals, until relatively cheap and reliable means were available for producing them. So it was only in 1967, for instance, that the Public Archives of Canada felt deluged enough to set up "a special organizational unit . . . to acquire, preserve, inventory, and make available for research, speech recordings of historical value to Canada;" though the Archives had begun to

collect sound recordings almost thirty years before.[7] If the various Provincial Archives do not have such special divisions, it is probably because they are less ponderous in size than the PAC; certainly it is not because they do not collect or recognise the importance of recorded oral testimony and other audible documents: on the contrary, the Saskatchewan Archives, for instance, has listed accessions of this kind in every biennial report since 1948-50.[8]

Many of the sound recordings currently in archives were produced "for public relations purposes" (that is, as programme material of some kind), or as research documents, during preparation for a broadcast or printed publication.

> As you would expect, the major collective source of sound recordings consists of the media agencies such as the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation and the National Film Board in the public sector and the radio and television stations as well as the disc and film producers in the private sector.[9]

But all sorts of government departments and agencies, as well as "individuals, corporations, institutions and associations" in the private sector are beginning to produce their own sound recordings, just as they have long produced written materials--and for archival as well as public relations purposes. Some of these records, the ones of public proceedings of governments, political parties, professional associations and educational institutions, are made available for research use almost immediately--as soon, at least, as provisions can be made for their preservation and control. This has been done

either at the archives of their producers or, as is quite often more convenient all round, in an appropriate public archival institution. But not enough time has elapsed, since such recordings began to be made, for any great number of the ones arising from the non-public proceedings of these agencies to have been donated to public archives or declared open for research use. Recording equipment is now widely enough available so that private individuals can--and some of them already do--dictate letters (personal as well as business), diaries and memoirs onto tape, and either keep them in that form or have them transcribed or both. But habits like that take time to acquire, and the material they yield will take time to accumulate. So although personal diaries, memoirs and collections of "letters" on tape may eventually be donated to public archives, just as is now done with collections of personal papers, archival institutions have as yet announced only a few such acquisitions.[10] And finally--"finally" because they are likely to be the least numerous of historical sound recordings in the long run, not because they are likely to be of least importance--there are records of "oral history interviews" in many Canadian archives.[11]

These are the results of efforts by collectors--amateur and professional, academic and non-academic--to capture information of historical interest that might not otherwise find its way into the permanent record: information in the form of participant or eyewitness testimony

about events, or in the form of historical oral traditions; information which is potentially available only so long as there are witnesses or bearers alive to impart it. Relatively inexpensive and portable sound recording equipment has been as much a boon to collectors of oral sources for historical purposes as it has been to collectors of folklore, folk music and the like. Folklorists and broadcasters in the course of their work were probably the first to make recordings of historical oral testimony in Canada,[12] though they did not refer either to the material, or to the process of gathering it, as "oral history". This designation for the material, along with a good deal of impetus to the work of gathering it, was imported from the United States by various routes in the late 1960's and early 1970's.[13] However, this is not to suggest that no work of the sort was carried on by historians and archivists in Canada before the Gospel of Oral History arrived![14] Also, many amateur conservationists of historical material, as they have seen the passing of phases in their local or special areas that threatened to go unrecorded, have added to their established repertoires of artifact- and paper-collecting the gathering on tape of the spoken reminiscences of their elders and contemporaries.[15] Often an anniversary occasion of some kind has given the original impetus to such projects. Several have been assisted with government grants;[16] and they have been encouraged by national and provincial archives, who have been willing to

lend advice, equipment, sometimes even personnel, and who will house the material gathered by these projects.[17] Though, all told, a large quantity of oral history interviews has already been produced, and though very few of them are of a confidential nature and therefore under seal for the present, few oral history collections are as yet large enough, or well enough organised and advertised, to have attracted many researchers from outside the circle of those who produced them.[18]

The stock of historical sound recordings of all kinds now in public archives is already large enough for the claim to be fairly made that these recordings contribute in at least a minor way to the documentation of a great many aspects of our relatively recent past. Details of our intellectual and cultural life, of both the "business" and "labour" aspects of our economic life, of our political and social history, and of the history of science and technology in Canada may be found in the various sound archives, records of radio and television broadcasts and public events, and oral history interviews that have been and are being made.[19] Like all other documents, whether the result of intentional or incidental "record-making", these sound recordings are a source of information for the historian. In some instances they may be the sole source or the most complete source available. In other instances they may only duplicate part or all of a full written record, but even so, they retain "the tones

and inflections of the spoken word which can convey information not evident in the written word"[20]--information which, depending on what questions one is asking of one's sources, may be very worth having. Beyond being sources of information, to be used in the context of whatever stories, presented in whatever form (written, spoken or audio-visual) the historian chooses, these sound recordings may be used "to re-create past statements and events":

> The recordings of actual statements and events have fixed on a recording medium the sounds of actual moments in time thus making these sounds timeless. Whether the sound recording medium be played back minutes, days or decades after the happening of an event or statement, the sounds of that event or statement are perceived as if they were just happening at the moment of listening. Because these recordings reproduce the sounds of past events they are mainly used as production material for broadcasts, exhibitions, audio-visual teaching aids, and recorded documentaries, in which these events are re-created. Through the broadcast and exhibition of sound recordings from past events, the listener can sense the actual atmosphere of past events as if he or she were present at these events. For example, to mark the 25th anniversary of Newfoundland's entry into the Canadian Confederation on the 1st of April 1949, the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation recently produced an hour and a half documentary using extracts from the recorded proceedings of the constitutional convention, known as the National Convention, which met from 1946 to 1948 to debate the future form of government for Newfoundland. This convention preceded the referendum which finally decided that Newfoundland should join the Canadian Confederation. The daily proceedings of the National Convention were recorded and broadcast in the evening so that the population of Newfoundland could be fully informed of the discussions. The recordings of these broadcasts thus provide an invaluable and unique medium whereby one can recapture and understand Newfoundland's entry into Canada.[21]

And because the Canadian Bankers' Association saw fit to

record, from radio broadcasts at the time, the speeches of William Aberhart, we may now hear what Albertans of the 1930's heard; we can, in other words, partially re-create a phenomenon which was very important in their lives, and in our past.[22]

Recently there has been considerable interest, scholarly and otherwise, in historical studies for which photographic evidence and oral testimony, both "live" and recorded, are obvious and available sources--that is to say, an interest in more contemporary personalities and events, including some which have not generated much in the way of written records. J. L. Granatstein, of York University, says that contemporary personalities and events in some areas of traditional historical interest, such as the political arena, are not producing the written records they once did, so,

> the need for [other sources in these areas] is present and increasing . . . .
> . . . . Until now our history has been largely prepared from manuscript sources, from the letters of politicians and their friends, and from the memoranda and documents of organizations and government departments. Today, in an age of conference telephone calls and easy jet travel, the letter is dead or dying. Everyone of the politicians in Parliament today has free telephone service and virtually unlimited travel to his constituency. In such circumstances and without their traditional sources, how will historians be able to discover what the policy-makers and politicians were doing? Very simply, they won't.[23]

--Except insofar as they can get the "policy-makers and politicians" to <u>tell</u> them what went on. And this they could do in recorded interviews, to be closed for the time

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being if necessary, so that future historians at least, if not present ones as well, might have the benefit of some accounting of "important" personalities and events, beyond what was available in the sources of public information of their day.[24]

> But it must be added that this technique also allows historians to create and have access to the history of the people. This is a potential breakthrough to a new kind of history--a true story of the events and their participants.[25]

--Well, at least it makes possible a new perspective on events of traditional interest, and a perspective on specific events or types of events that historical studies have traditionally neglected--"unofficial" events, for instance.

Spoken reminiscences were an important source, along with letters, photographs, and memoirs written varying lengths of time after the event, for Victor Hoar's book, The Mackenzie-Papineau Battalion: Canadian Participation in the Spanish Civil War, published in 1969. This is described as an account of "an unofficial but heroic event that does credit to . . . many Canadians who, without thought of reward or fame, followed a dangerous course to Spain"--more than 1200 of them, in fact, in the latter 1930's.[26] Hoar found that a set of interviews had actually been done on his chosen subject a few years previously, and full records of these had been kept, such that later researchers could use them.[27] This has seldom happened thus far in the annals of the use of oral sources in

historical studies in Canada. It meant that Hoar was not obliged, as are most historians who use this type of source, to start from scratch and gather all his own material out in the field. He supplemented his archival "find" with further interviews, of which he in his turn kept full records, as good oral history practice would dictate.[28] At the time of writing, Hoar felt compelled to explain "this use of tape-recorded interviews made long after the event described":

> Oral History, as it has come to be styled, is still new to Canadian historians although it has flourished in the United States for twenty years. Since the respondents are expected to rely upon memory in their account of this or that episode, the scholar may well ask just how valid are such interviews. The memory is not the most reliable of instruments. But in the case of mass interviews conducted on a common subject, a common experience emerges from individual descriptions which can be authenticated by reference to the handful of pertinent books and articles available and which can be further authenticated simply by the fact that isolated men having little or no contact with one another over the years come up with essentially the same story again and again.[29]

The book is remarkable for the number and variety of points on which spoken reminiscences are cited throughout. It is also remarkable in that the instances of use of interview data, and the names of those who gave it, are clearly indicated throughout.[30] Partly, this is a reflection of the author's approach to all his sources, which is a "scholarly" one (i.e. which involves careful statement and citing of the sources one has used). Hoar's approach to and handling of oral testimony is the enlightened one of the "oral historian", who considers it his

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business to make as full a record as he can of hitherto unrecorded testimony, for the benefit of future researchers, and to identify his sources as specifically as their wishes or his own discretion will allow. In The Mackenzie-Papineau Battalion he was able to name names, perhaps because all involved were so thoroughly satisfied with the results of the interviews that they were proud to be identified with what they said; perhaps, too, because these veterans were not worried that their having given testimony about their experiences in the International Brigade, or their being identified as having done so, would cause them any present embarrassment or trouble.[31]

Precisely this consideration--present embarrassment or trouble for his informants--would have prevented Barry Broadfoot from publishing their real names or other identifying details, even if he had kept records of these, in his chronicles of the Canadian experience of economic depression and world war: Ten Lost Years, 1929-1939: Memories of Canadians who Survived the Depression, and Six War Years, 1939-1945: Memories of Canadians at Home and Abroad, published in 1973 and 1974 respectively. These books are based entirely on spoken reminiscences; in fact they are quite simply spoken reminiscences, which Broadfoot has rendered into readable form. They are about, and expressed in the words of, "ordinary people. The survivors. The soldiers, so to speak, not the Generals."[32] Only the photographs included in these books were obtained from the

conventional research sources, public archives and libraries, and newspaper files. Broadfoot toured the country with notebook and tape recorder to obtain the testimony of the "survivors":

> I interviewed hundreds of people, so many I lost count. Some encounters were casual, the small talk of two strangers, but I would shift the talk around to the Depression and often they never knew why I did so. Other interviews were intensive, with the conversation firmly pointed on the subject for an hour or two. I interviewed people in their homes, in offices, in stores, in bars, in cafes, while travelling and while on the street. I even met people on radio hot-line shows, where the switchboard would invariably flash up red with people eager to tell their . . . stories.[33]

The collection and publication of this kind of testimony about personal experiences of depression and wartime is widely acknowledged to have given the present and future a perspective on those times that we might not otherwise have had. One may regret, along with reviewer Richard Lochead, that Broadfoot did not press his informants harder for interpretation:

> People when interviewed about events tend to have interpretations for them, and not to encourage these interpretations is to miss the opportunity to learn why people acted the way they did. Although Broadfoot claims in his preface that most people did not have any answer to the question of why, this [may reflect] more on his question method than on his interviewee's intellect. Studs Terkel, in his Oral History of the Depression found no shortage of analyses among his subjects, and this surely cannot be attributed solely to the speculative nature of the American mind.[34]

Granted that the emphasis in the answers one receives depends upon the emphasis in the questions one asks. But if Broadfoot had asked his "survivors" for more in the way

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of interpretation, he might only have got it at the expense of much he was actually given in the way of information and anecdote. One may also regret that Broadfoot's procedures did not allow for the compiling of a full and fully documented record of the testimony he obtained--archives of his work to which future researchers, if not present ones, might have access.[35] The books themselves are the sole permanent record of the testimony given.

This has almost always been the case with historical studies, scholarly or otherwise, which have drawn on interview material whether as a major or minor source, and whether for the purpose of quoting it directly or building a narrative from it: most of the oral testimony used has had to be gathered personally by the historian who wants to use it; and the only permanent record of the testimony obtained is the published work. John A. Irving's study of The Social Credit Movement in Alberta [1932-1935], published in 1959, "is based mainly upon interviews with people in Alberta,"[36] because to a significant degree only they could tell the story. Irving does not explain what kind of records he made of this testimony, nor whether or where any such records have been preserved. He does say that,

> in nearly every instance, people have not wished their names identified with interviews, private papers, or private collections. . . .
> . . . . Documentation of interviews in research of this type could have involved thousands of references in footnotes to interviews, most of which would have had to remain anonymous.[37]

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So there is no documentation comparable to that in Hoar's Mackenzie-Papineau Battalion. Partly, this was due to the specifics of the case: Irving was studying a topic about which people were willing to give information, but on condition that they not be identified with it. There will always be testimony on some topics that must be handled in this way, if it is to be obtained and used at all. In any case, Irving can hardly be described as "unenlightened" or "casual" in his use of oral sources in The Social Credit Movement; his approach to and handling of them would be better characterised as "pragmatic" and "discreet". He has seldom failed to give at least a little information about any informant whose testimony he has quoted directly--and he has "quoted directly, rather than paraphrased [such testimony], when[ever] it is especially controversial . . ., or especially illuminating . . . [which was by no means infrequently the case with this testimony]."[38] But partly also, the lack of detailed documentation of interview material in this scholarly study--and the lack of detailed explanation as to how the material was obtained, whether full and fully documented records of it have been preserved, if not, why not, and if so, where and when they will be available--are a reflection of the time when the study was undertaken.[39]

At the time of Irving's study (in the 1950's), there was simply not the intensity of research interest in or pressure on interview material as a source of histori-

cal information that one finds now, only fifteen years later. And along with this current interest in and pressure on oral sources--no doubt largely a result of it--one finds a heightened concern both for the conservation of these sources, and for careful documentation of their use in historical works. Some miscellaneous examples: Lief Stolee, in an unpublished Ph.D. thesis, The Parliamentary Career of William Irvine (1969), F. Richard Swann, in a Ph.D. thesis, Progressive Social Credit in Alberta, 1935-1940 (1971), and Carl Betke, in an article, "The Mounted Police and the Doukhobors in Saskatchewan, 1899-1909" (1974), have all used records of interview material obtained by others, and have documented their use of these as carefully as they do any of their other archival sources.[40] Stolee and Swann have also used interview material they obtained themselves, as have Richard Allen in his book The Social Passion: Religion and Social Reform in Canada, 1914-28, and Donald B. Smith in his article "Grey Owl," both published in 1971, and as has Dorothy Heppler, in an unpublished Honours Essay, Joseph Charles Heppler (1879-1920): a Case History of Community Development in Alberta, 1895-1920 (1975).[41] All account for their use of personally obtained interview material much more carefully than they might have done, or been expected to do, had they presented their work even a decade earlier. But almost no one who cites oral testimony gathered by himself has as yet gone beyond the formula: "interview with 'x',

at (place), on (date)," to say that a record of the same has been preserved, and that this record is or will be available, where, when, and to whom.[42] It is to be hoped that both conservation of any oral testimony they have gathered, and declaration in their published works that they have done so, will become standard practice for all historians whose studies involve the use of this source. They would be doing a favour--and one which need not involve much extra expense or distraction from their immediate research objectives--not only for their colleagues, present and future, but also for any of their living informants in the "hotter" areas of contemporary historical studies, who must surely resent being asked the same questions over and over, by one interviewer-historian after another.

The recent formation of a Canadian Oral History Association,[43] with a nation-wide membership which includes collectors, archivists and historians of all kinds, reflects the present extent of interest in and pressure on oral sources. It also bespeaks the seriousness of present concern for proper conservation and use of these sources. The conventions and publications of this organisation will be welcome additional channels, just as those of the Oral History Association have been in the United States, for the communication of ideas and information on what has been, is being and might be done to get "live" oral and

audible evidence on record, and to use both "live" and recorded evidence of this kind in historical studies.

NOTES TO CHAPTER VII

1 W. L. Morton, "Clio in Canada: the Interpretation of Canadian History," Approaches to Canadian History: Essays by W. A. Mackintosh, et al., University of Toronto Press, Canadian Historical Readings, no. 1 (1967), p. 42: "But what determines the questions the historian puts? He puts a question because he wants an answer, not a particular answer to a question, but an answer to a particular question. That question is determined by his interest in it, the interest arising out of his experience. That is, he wishes to extend and confirm his experience. The interest of his readers will be the same as his own, to extend and confirm their experience. Prejudice may prevent their doing so; new facts may modify old, new arguments engender new convictions. But the new knowledge and the fresh judgement must be assimilable to experience, or they will be rejected."

2 J. M. S. Careless, "Frontierism, Metropolitanism, and Canadian History," Approaches to Canadian History, p. 65. Careless uses the expression specifically with reference to "the paper-strewn path to national status."

3 See Donna McDonald, ed., Directory of Historical Societies and Agencies in the United States and Canada, 1973-1974, a joint publication of the AASLH, Nashville, Tenn., and Inforonics, Inc., Maynard, Mass., copyright 1972. Notes kinds of collections or holdings of these agencies.

4 Witness the use of photographs in films and television programmes, as well as in the printed publications of provincial historical societies, for instance (see for example Alberta History, Saskatchewan History, Ontario History), and in recent histories on latter-19th and 20th century topics (see especially the "illustrated histories" such as Anthony W. Gashman's An Illustrated History of Western Canada, Edmonton, Hurtig, 1971, and Stanley W. Horrall's The Pictorial History of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, Toronto, McGraw-Hill/Ryerson, 1973).

5 "Historical Sound Recordings," pp. 12-13.

6 See APPENDIX IV, for a report on the collection of audible documents at the PAA.

7 La Clare, "Historical Sound Recordings," p. 2.

8 See Saskatchewan Archives, biennial reports of the Saskatchewan Archives Board, Fourth (1948-50) to Sixteenth (1972-74). Accessions are listed under "Radio Recordings"

in vol. 4, "Sound Recordings" in vols. 5-7, and under "Sound Recordings and Films" in all subsequent vols.

9 La Clare, "Historical Sound Recordings," p. 3.

10 Saskatchewan Archives mentions a few privately produced "reminiscences": one in vol. 7 (1954-56), two in vol. 15 (1970-72), and four in vol. 16 (1972-74). See also APPENDIX IV, where mention is made of such documents in the PAA: none of these are of the extensive, intimate sort which might have to be closed or restricted for a time, as some written memoirs and diaries have had to be; rather, they are brief and superficial.

11 See surveys: "Oral History and Sound Archives in Canada," The Canadian Archivist, vol. 2, no. 2 (1971), pp. 52-70; "Directory of Canadian Oral History," RRAS Publication, vol. 2, no. 2 (1973), pp. 34-52.

12 La Clare and Gagnon, "Méthodes," p. 14.

13 for instance by American writers (Hoar, Mackenzie-Papineau Battalion), researchers (Langlois, of RRAS, now Aural History, PABC), spokesmen (Morrissey of the OHA), and publications (especially those of the SAA, the AASLH, and the OHA, which one finds on hand in the reference libraries of Canadian archives (e.g. the PAA, and the Archives of the Rky. Mtns., Banff) and recommended by Canadian archivists, as, for instance, in the Archival Association of the Atlantic Provinces Newsletter, no. 2 (March 1974), where oral history is discussed on pp. 11-14). Also, Canadians have attended OHA meetings (see Jean Morrison, "A View from McGill," Sound Heritage, vol. 3, no. 1 (1974), pp. 22-23), and visited American oral history programmes to see how they operate (M. H. Stewart of the Archives of the Rky. Mtns. visited Columbia).

14 One finds the first mention of tape recorded interviews done by archives staff in the province of Saskatchewan, for instance, in Saskatchewan Archives, vol. 7 (1954-56), and then mention of an increasing amount of such activity in every report since vol. 11 (1962-64); also by others besides archives staff since that time ('62-'64). See also APPENDIX IV on such activity at the PAA.

15 Leo La Clare, in his address "Directions," at the Canadian Aural/Oral History Conference, 18 October 1974, said that this trend is particularly strong in Canada's Prairie West, and probably has much to do with the recent passing of the settlement phase in this region.

16 See La Clare, "Oral History in Canada," p. 2; also Saskatchewan Archives, vol. 16 (1972-74), p. 20.

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17 See La Clare, "Historical Sound Recordings," pp. 4, 7-8, on PAC policy. Examples of the advice given by provincial and regional archives are: the reference libraries and recommendations mentioned in note 13 above, and Provincial Museum and Archives of Alberta, "Recording Local History by Tape-Recorded Interviews," a leaflet which includes advice on procedures, forms for documenting the interview material gathered, and a "Checklist of Basic Questions for the Recording of Local History." An example of personnel being lent: Esther Kreisel of the PMAA did interviews with the teaching Sisters of Providence in northern Alberta in 1972 (records of these in phonotape collection at the PAA; anecdotes about the project from conversations with Mrs. Kreisel, October 1974).

18 On the verge of being exceptions: the PAC and Glenbow, if only because so many researchers go there; also Aural History/PABC, which has a large collection, and which furthermore advertises that collection and promotes its use in published works (see Catalogue of Oral History Phonotapes in the University of British Columbia Libraries, Vancouver, RRAS Oral History Programme, 1973; and RRAS Publication/Sound Heritage magazines). Notations in surveys of oral history collections in Canada (see note 11 above) would suggest that hoarding of collections has not inhibited research use; rather, the problem has been fragmentation: lack of use of these collections has been largely a reflection of their lack of "critical mass"--that which is necessary to attract researchers--a problem which the mighty Columbia OHRO only overcame after fifteen years' work at building up its collection of spoken memoirs (see Chapter VI, note 7, p. 140 above). The reference archivist at the PAA says use of its collection has picked up noticeably in the last year or so (see APPENDIX IV).

19 For specific examples of such documentation in the PAC, see La Clare, "Historical Sound Recordings," pp. 14-18, 21-22.

20 Ibid., p. 7.

21 Ibid., pp. 19-20.

22 "Aberhart's Voice Booms through University Lecture Theatre," Edmonton Journal, 5 June 1975, p. 3.

23 "Oral Interviews: York University's Oral History Programme," The Canadian Archivist, vol. 2, no. 2 (1971) (hereafter cited as: "Oral Interviews"), p. 32.

24 "In sum, that is the rationale for an oral history programme . . . .

"We know, of course, that human memory is distressingly fallible. People remember what they choose, and men in

public life, in particular, often tend to portray themselves in the best light possible. Notwithstanding these drawbacks, oral history gives the historian of the present access to a source he would not otherwise have. As with all sources he uses, of course, he must exercise care, but imagine what historians could do with oral interviews with the participants in the Charlottetown or Quebec conference, with men involved in the conscription crisis of 1917, or with the men who served with and turned against John Diefenbaker." ("Oral Interviews," p. 32.)

25 Loc. cit.

26 Estimate of contingent's size is given in preface, Victor Hoar, The Mackenzie-Papineau Battalion: Canadian Participation in the Spanish Civil War, Toronto, The Copp Clark Publishing Company, 1969 (hereafter cited as: Hoar, Mackenzie-Papineau Battalion), p. viii. Quotation from a postscript to the preface, by Mac Reynolds, research assistant, p. x.

27 He found these not in "the obvious archives, the Canadian Army historical section or the Public Archives of Canada . . . [but in] the Program Archives Department of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation . . . . Oral history is a technique that will more and more play an important part in the description of Canada in the twentieth century. The Program Archives Department of the CBC has long been involved in this activity; its files are ladened with exciting, exceptional interviews, examples for any historian or archivist of the country who might wish to investigate this new method." (Hoar, Mackenzie-Papineau Battalion, pp. vii-viii.)

28 Ibid., p. vii.

29 Loc. cit. It has been pointed out above that the recording of oral reminiscences was not as new to Canadian historians and archivists as Hoar would imply; but promotion and explanation of this type of source in published historical works is indeed newer to Canada than to the U.S.

30 Ibid., pp. 256-279 ("Notes" and "Bibliography").

31 Hoar's research assistant Mac Reynolds says of the veterans he interviewed that they "ranged in age from fifty to seventy-five years and represented almost every ethnic group in Canada . . . . I found them, thirty years after [their time in the International Brigade], settled into private life, not bitter, not politically paranoid, but satisfied that they had done their best." (see postscript to preface in Hoar, Mackenzie-Papineau Battalion, p. x.)

32 Broadfoot, in preface to Ten Lost Years, p. vi.

33 Ibid., p. v.

34 "Review: Ten Lost Years," Sound Heritage, vol. 3, no. 2 (1974), p. 36.

35 Broadfoot explained, during the "Authors" panel at the Canadian Aural/Oral History Conference in 1974, that time and other limitations compelled him to "edit-as-he-went". Many of the critics' queries might eventually have been answered if complete archives of Broadfoot's research had been kept--queries, that is, about the amount of material gathered, the principles of selection for publication, the questions asked of the informants, and so on (see Lochead, "Review," p. 36).

36 Irving, in preface to The Social Credit Movement, p. x.

37 Loc. cit.

38 Ibid., p. xi. See particularly chapter II, "The Prophet," chapters VIII and IX on "The Response of the People," and chapter X, "The Struggle for Power."

39 another example: Seymour Martin Lipset, in Agrarian Socialism: the Cooperative Commonwealth Federation, first published in 1950, made extensive use of interview material, though he does not say how that material was recorded or whether any records were kept, and he identifies specific instances of such use only by vague notations like: "Interviews with former members of . . .," and "Interviews with leaders of . . . ."

40 Stolee, in Irvine's Parliamentary Career, University of Alberta, cites "tape recordings (Floyd Johnson's private collection)," several interviews done in the early 1960's, in his bibliography; he refers to the material from time to time throughout the thesis, but primarily in Chapter I, "A Biographical Sketch of Irvine's Career."
Swann, in Progressive Social Credit, University of Cincinnati, cites recordings of interviews by Una Maclean (1961-63), and of a CBC broadcast "Profiles in Politics" (1961), which he found at the Glenbow Foundation (see "Bibliography," p. 268).
Betke, in "The Mounted Police and the Doukhobors," Saskatchewan History, vol. 27, no. 1 (Winter), pp. 1-14, cites interviews which were done by RCMP historian S. W. Horrall in 1969 and are on deposit in the PAC.

41 Allen, in The Social Passion, University of Toronto Press, refers to "interviews" and "conversations" only rarely, but he explains exactly how and where he has used

these (see "Bibliography," p. 358; also p. 46, n. 48; and p. 225, n. 32).

Smith, in "Grey Owl," Ontario History, vol. 63, no. 3 (September), pp. 161-176, cites interviews with surviving associates of Archibald Belaney/Grey Owl as his sources in 12 of 91 notes, a fair number on a subject already so well documented in written and photographic records; he found that these interviews both confirmed and supplemented what the other documentation reveals about this character.

Heppler's study (the "Community" referred to is Morinville) makes extensive use of oral reminiscences; points on which interview data is the sole or supplementary source are clearly indicated in notes throughout. Each of the ten interviews obtained (all but one by the author) is listed in the bibliography according to name of person interviewed, where, and when, followed by the notation "(Oral)," which may or may not have been meant to signify that the interviews were taped.

42 Edwin A. Tollefson, "The Medicare Dispute," in Norman Ward and Duff Spafford, eds., Politics in Saskatchewan, Don Mills, Ont., Longman's Canada Limited, 1968, pp. 238-279, is one of the few exceptions. His many references to tape recorded interviews include the notation "The tape recording is in the Saskatchewan Archives."

43 This is the name finally settled on at the 1975 convention in St. John's Nfld., in preference to the cumbersome title "Canadian Aural/Oral History Association," chosen at the first convention, held in 1974 at Simon Fraser University in B.C. The French equivalent of the old title, "Societe canadienne d'histoire orale et sonore," at least had a better ring to it than the English; but it too was more cumbersome than it needed to be (see COHA Bulletin, vol. 1, no. 3 (December 1975), p. 2). See above, Chapter VI, note 6, pp. 139-40, for a statement of the objectives of this organisation.

# CHAPTER VIII

## CONCLUSION

Historical work is a reflection of the society in which and for which it is done. Little wonder, then, that the spoken word and the audible document are beginning to enter into historical work being done today. Audible (and audio-visual) documents enter into such work because these now exist in sufficient quantity and variety so as to attest to any number of important and interesting events. And oral testimonies from living witnesses to and participants in events, and from bearers of oral tradition, enter into it because historians are now more interested in the sorts of contemporary and/or unorthodox themes and topics for which oral testimony has always been a potentially available source.

A large part of this paper has been given over to the discussion of "oral history", not because this is now or is ever likely to be the predominant form of documentation of oral and audible source material, but because it is an effort at deliberate creation of documents for historical purposes--an effort initiated by people who know, or are supposed to know, something about historical

documentation in their field. As such, oral history documents might have a value as historical source material out of proportion to their volume, and might be worth the inconveniences of consulting them. --They might: depending on the extent to which their instigators will concentrate on matters which are not already more fully or more reliably recorded in alternative forms of documentation. Depending, too, on what the eventual users of oral history documents choose to ask of them. Oral history interviewers may be warned that:

> Of one thing you may be certain, no user will be satisfied with your interviews; each will wish you had spent more time on the subject of his special concern and had not wasted your time on subjects he is not interested in. [All you can do] in trying to out-guess the future, [is to] aim at a well-rounded interview with emphasis on what the narrator can tell best.[1]

Really, "the future" can expect no more:

> In fact, much of the historian's criticism of oral history arises from the outrageous demands he makes upon it. No one requires of a statesman's letters that they be beyond all criticism, that they be well organized and provide economically available mines of material. No one insists of a government archive that it provide only reliable materials which the historian may accept with a minimum of critical concern. Yet oral history is often viewed as if it claimed miracles and as if it might properly be dismissed as soon as it appeared incapable of automatically turning personal memoir into unimpeachable historic truth. No one would expect Napoleon's "diary" to be "objective," yet we would rush to consult it, were it discovered.[2]

And the historian inquiring into lives and events not well represented in other forms of documentation might well "rush to consult" the records of oral history interviews

which illuminated those areas even a little, if anyone has had the foresight and/or other motives to create such records.

Historians are quite largely "the slaves of the document makers"[3]--dependent on what the surviving evidence can tell them about "what was" and "what happened" in the past. They will be no less the slaves of the makers of audible documents, including "oral history" ones, than they have been of the makers of written or any other kinds of records. And in the use of contemporary evidence, including "live" oral testimony, historians are now, as they have always been, the slaves of their own and their informants' perceptions, memories, and motives. Nevertheless, oral and audible evidence, both "live" and recorded,

> not only provides the possibility of broadening the coverage and providing [another means of] cross-checking of historical data, it also makes possible a modification of the ancient selective bias by which we have been forced to view the past largely through the eyes of those participants who left written records.[4]

NOTES TO CHAPTER VIII

1 Baum, Oral History, p. 57.

2 Rollins, Report, p. 7.

3 Ibid., p. 11.

4 Loc. cit.

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Canadian Oral History Association Bulletin.

Edmonton Journal. Daily.

Forest History. Quarterly.

Journal of Library History. Quarterly.

Oral History Association Newsletter.

Saskatchewan Archives. Biennial reports of the Saskatchewan Archives Board.

Sound Heritage. Formerly Reynoldston Research and Studies Publication.

Time (Canada Edition).

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APPENDIX I

ORAL HISTORY: SCALE OF VALUE RELATIVE TO THE AVAILABILITY OF WRITTEN RECORDS*

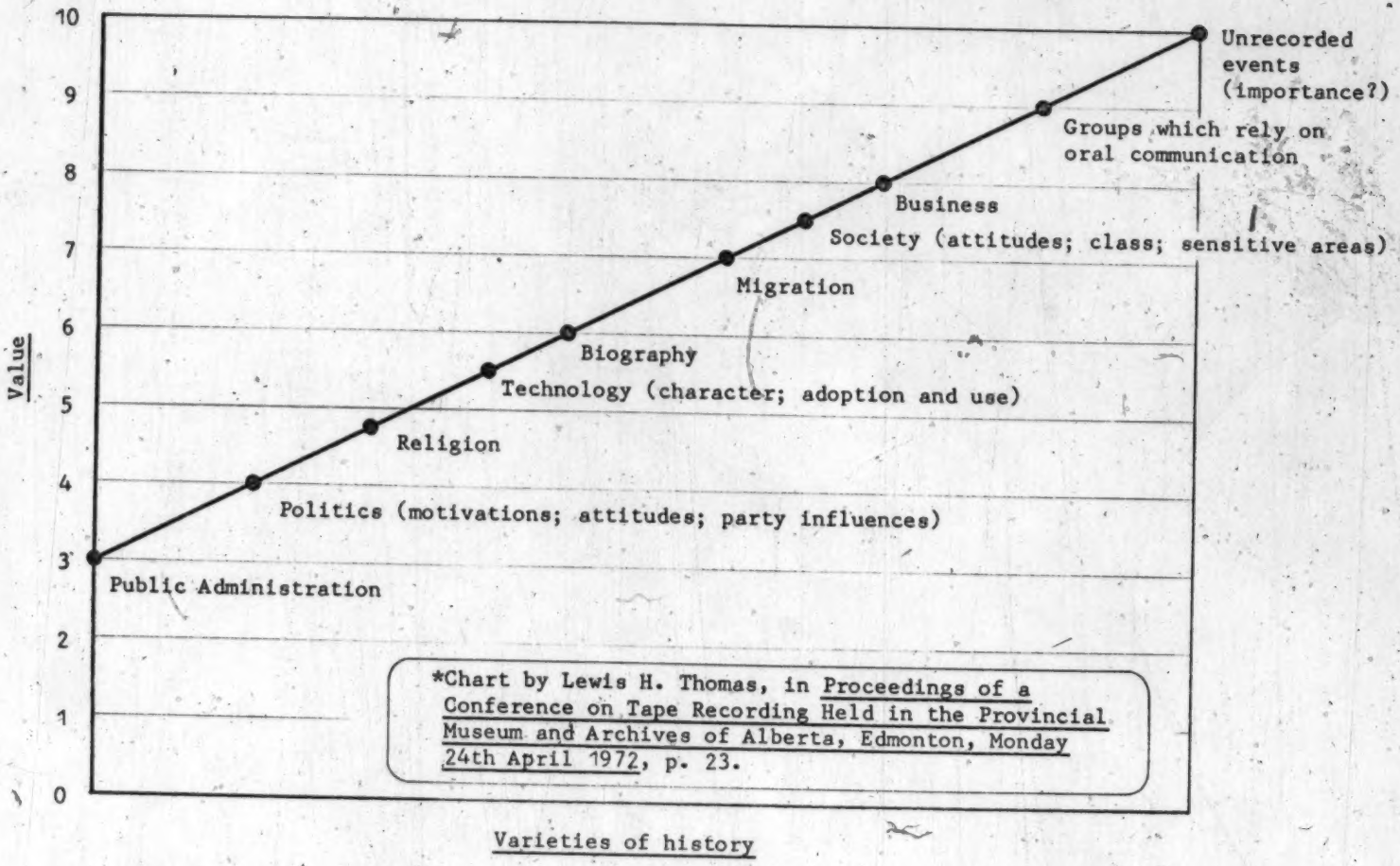


*Chart by Lewis H. Thomas, in Proceedings of a Conference on Tape Recording Held in the Provincial Museum and Archives of Alberta, Edmonton, Monday 24th April 1972, p. 23.

## APPENDIX II

## THOUGHTS OF AN HISTORIAN OF AFRICA ON THE ADVISABILITY OF MAKING FULL AND FULLY-DOCUMENTED RECORDS OF HISTORICAL ORAL TESTIMONY*

"Oral tradition as a source for African history has been subject to a certain amount of controversy in recent decades. These discussions have clarified both the uses and the problems of oral data; they have raised important methodological issues, but they have also beclouded others. At the higher theoretical levels, the debate has involved the philosophy of history and the nature of historical knowledge. These issues are both interesting and important, but the discussion is not very helpful to the working historian. At another level, the debate has been more practical and far less helpful. We are told, on one hand, that oral sources are a brand new body of data, waiting in great volume to open vast areas of African history that were previously obscure. Other authorities have taken the opposite view. . . .

"Neither . . . extreme . . . is likely to ring true to the experience of historians who have actually worked with oral tradition. Both its novelty as a source and its outright rejection as evidence are alien to the discipline and standards of historical work. . . . Social scientists, who are mainly concerned with the present, are accustomed to asking questions and getting answers with relative ease. Historians, on the other hand, are trained to be cynical about all evidence, perhaps because they often have so little of it. The dead answer no questions, and they rarely leave direct evidence for a clear answer to the historian's problem. The traditions of the historian's craft have therefore stressed the necessity of using every scrap of evidence that can be found, but taking nothing at face

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* excerpt from the article by Philip D. Curtin, "Field Techniques for Collecting and Processing Oral Data," Journal of African History, vol. 9, no. 3 (1968), pp. 367-371.

value. The standard manuals always point out the need to look beyond the written words of a document, to archaeology, diplomatics, epigraphy, or fictional literature. Far from rejecting oral tradition, or any other type of evidence, they point out that even the recognized forgery can sometimes be made to serve as indirect evidence. Oral tradition is therefore anything but a new source. Classicists have mined Homer for all manner of data, just as medievalists have used Beowulf or the Chanson de Roland--to say nothing of Froissart's Chronicles and much more.

"The traditional canon of historical scholarship is clear and universally accepted in the profession: every relevant source must be taken into account, but no source is to be accepted uncritically. The core of the discipline is search and evaluation leading to generalization. In regard to any kind of evidence, the rule is: if it exists, it must be consulted. The operative word is 'consulted'. No source has to be used, but all must be examined to see whether they can yield evidence to help solve the problem at hand. The question whether or not oral tradition should be used is therefore not a real problem until relevant traditions have been found and examined, or else have been shown not to exist.

"But the problem of searching out oral data may seem to put an added burden on historians of Africa. These already find themselves in need of help from many other disciplines, and are burdened with written sources in two or three European languages, plus Arabic for most of Africa north of the forest, with at least one African language now required of most Ph.D. candidates in African history in the United States. When the apprentice historian finds himself obliged also to get out into the rural areas with a tape recorder--if only to make sure that no relevant data is available there--the weight seems likely to put the camel out of his misery, his back having long since broken under the rest of the load.

"The burden is large, and much of it is inescapable, in the sense that certain historical problems cannot be solved without looking at a very wide range of sources. But the particular range of sources will differ with the problem. Oral traditions, which are a particularly useful source for some aspects of African history, are not useful for others. The only way to find out is to look. If a body of pertinent oral traditions exist, they can be collected and consulted without a radical departure from the ordinary standards and methods of historical investigation. With care, a few short cuts are possible. A historian, for example, should know all relevant languages--but in many cases this is a practical impossibility, and hardly worth while if the quantity of material in a particular language is small. In that case, careful work with interpreters, tape recorders, and translators may make it possible to go ahead in ways that will not be seriously damaging

to the final conclusions. Nor is the collection of oral tradition in the field a matter of technical difficulty. The main problems are solved by common sense, and the main precaution is to know in advance what steps have to be taken along the way to make a collection that will have the greatest possible value--both to the historian himself and to those who may follow him in future over the same ground.

"It is necessary to be concerned about the future as well as the immediate historical problem in present-day Africa. The pace of modernization and of political change is sweeping away older orally transmitted traditions, and the coming of independence has accelerated this process. In societies where a professional class of traditional historians existed, they were often under the patronage of the traditional rulers. Where forms of indirect rule preserved political structures through the colonial period, much historical knowledge survived as well. Now, in post-colonial Africa, many of these political structures have been dissolved, and certain traditions preserved for their political functions are no longer passed on. Tales and histories recited for their dramatic value appear to survive better, and oral data will always be useful for recent history. Orally transmitted knowledge is not therefore on the way to complete extinction, but the next two or three decades will be the last in which the present-day wealth of traditional history and lore will be available.

"Today's historians are therefore the last generation that will have such an opportunity to record those older traditions that still exist. The unusual opportunity implies an unusual obligation--an obligation not merely to make use of traditions when they do exist, but to preserve them with care and to leave them for the future. This, in turn, implies an important change in the way historians should work. By habit and training, the historian is an archival animal. He begins with a question and seeks an answer. The answer is most often found in public archives or printed books. Since these sources are available to all, the intermediate stages of note-taking and arranging the data are personal to the historian. His published analysis is verifiable through footnote references to the original sources. His notes have no value to anyone else, and they often end up in the trash-can along with the galley proof and a series of revised drafts.

"Field-work with oral data, however, requires another kind of method. Here the historian changes from his old role as an archive-user: he becomes, instead an archive-creator. His notes and tape recordings are no longer intermediate steps toward his own answer to a specific historical problem. They no longer refer back to the sources. Rather, they <u>are</u> the source, often a primary source that exists in his copy alone. Since the normal rules of historical verification require the historian to

cite the most original version of his sources, these same professional standards now require historians to preserve the sources in their most original form and to place these on public deposit. In that way, verification can take place as usual. Later historians can refer to the original material, reassess it, come to new conclusions, or use it to answer new questions.

"Unfortunately, these professional standards have not been followed by those who have performed the historian's function in Africa. Colonial administrators, travellers, and some anthropologists have been the most active collectors of oral tradition. They were not professional historians, nor were they principally concerned with preserving historical material for others to use. They therefore took notes for their use alone, and they came to conclusions that can no longer be checked. When they did leave notes on deposit in a library or archive, the notes are most often based on the words of a field interpreter, and the original words of the tradition cannot be recovered. To say this is not to underestimate the contribution of these early collectors. They worked at a time when traditional data were far more generally available than they are today, and pre-colonial history will continue to lean heavily on the sources these men preserved. But today's professional historians of Africa can and should work to a more professional standard.

"Field collection of oral tradition has been revolutionized by the development of small, cheap and portable tape recorders of reasonable sensitivity. It is therefore possible to work in ways that were not open to the earlier generations of collectors. Where field transcription of the original-language text was once extremely laborious, the words themselves can now be preserved with the flick of a switch. But tape recorders themselves raise a series of problems.

"One type of problem is that of personal relationships between the historian and his informants. Field collection of oral data in Africa or anywhere else depends on mutual confidence between the collector and those who have the information he wants. For this reason, hidden tape recorders or microphones should <u>never</u> be used. It is better to lose the few recordings that might have been made with hidden microphones than to risk a general loss of confidence and the consequent failure of the whole enterprise. Nevertheless, a tape recorder can change the psychological setting of an interview. At times, the informant will speak more fully if he knows he is speaking for posterity. At other times, he will speak far less frankly than he might have done in private conversation. Some kinds of historical knowledge have such profound implications for present-day politics that it is better not to introduce a tape recorder at all, though even in this situation the tape recorder remains the most convenient

and rapid way to make notes about an interview immediately after its close. In general, however, the advantages of tape recordings far outweigh the disadvantages; but each field situation will impose its own conditions, and the collector-historian must move with great care and tact until he understands how these conditions will affect his own effort.

"Another type of problem is technical, and the technical problems are not so much electronic as archival. Any amateur can make good voice recordings with only a little practice, but these recordings will not necessarily be useful as historical sources. It is all too easy to amass a collection of diffuse and unannotated conversations about the past. A sense of historical values and a rigorous adherence to professional standards is necessary in order to create a collection that will be useful to the historian himself, to say nothing of those who may follow him.

"The main problems are selection of the material to be recorded, annotation to render the recording fully comprehensible to those who hear it out of its own context in time and place, and record-keeping to make possible the retrieval of particular bodies of data. Although the careful construction of a series of taped oral sources takes more time than random note-taking, to make such a collection is neither over-conscientious dedication to scholarship nor simple altruism. A taped collection, complete with annotation and translation into a western language, can be a form of publication. It should always be identified by the name of the collector, who will receive recognition in the footnote citations of those who use it. In many cases, where a period of field-work leads both to a tape collection and a published book, the collection of sources will be used by scholars long after the book has become obsolete; and the preparation of a good collection of sources is as much a part of the historian's craft as a printed publication. The value of a completed collection will depend on the field-worker's historical knowledge, judgement, and imagination--the same qualities that lie behind good historical writing. And, like good historical writing, each problem in source collection demands its own solution. . . ."

## APPENDIX III

## THOUGHTS OF AN HISTORIAN OF THE UNITED STATES ON "ORAL HISTORY AND MODERN CONDITIONS"*

"It is frequently pointed out that the tape recorder arrived just when certain other mechanical inventions were destroying some traditional forms of evidence. It has been argued that oral history has become a pressing and major obligation because the airplane and the telephone have robbed us of the bulk of the meaningful record. Ambassadors need no longer be instructed by mail; they come to Washington, or perhaps join other policy makers in a recordless rendezvous at Honolulu or Bermuda or Geneva or Zanzibar. Chiefs of State no longer write letters to each other. They talk on a scrambler phone, or fly in and out of Washington like so many lobbyists at tariff time. . . . The implication is that perhaps oral history can become a substitute for the much-regretted written record.

"There is something to be said for this argument. Yet it is easily possible to overdo it, and thus to expect and demand too much of oral history.

"First, our situation is not quite so unique as it initially appears. The contrast is perhaps most stark in diplomatic history. In social history the lack of written records has always been a problem. In domestic political history there has always been a high level of discretion in letter-writing and much of the most significant maneuvering has always been left to private and unrecorded conversation. Witness the Constitutional Convention. After over 150 years of searching we still know very little about the evolution of certain sections of the Constitution, simply because the crucial conversations were not recorded, many of the most tantalizing items never set

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* the greater part of chapter 4 of the essay by Alfred B. Rollins, Jr., "Oral History: a Description and Appraisal," Report: the Oral History Project of the John Fitzgerald Kennedy Library, Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University, 1965, pp. 16-20.

down in letters. On the other hand, it is quite possible to make reasonably astute judgements about the politics of FDR even though his is a modern correspondence. Enough creeps into the record to make some learning possible, although one could always wish for more.

"One wonders, also, whether the documentation of the older years carried much of the information lacking now. We are not hard put to find out what was done. We want to know mostly why and how it was done. If one reads the diplomatic correspondence of the early nineteenth century, one is soon struck by the fact that there is little of why and how, and much of what. Ambassadors were not told in most cases the secret processes of conversations and consultation, or the secret exercises of mind which led to their instructions. Even letters, except in rare cases, told little of why a man acted as he did, or how things were to be done. We have considerable Hamilton correspondence but must still deduce from his actions as well as his words the nature of his attitudes toward his role in the Washington government. Are we worse off with FDR or Harry S. Truman or John Foster Dulles? On balance, it is not at all clear that the masses of Washington correspondence are essentially more revealing than the masses of FDR correspondence.

"Furthermore, in some ways modern conditions tend to produce a larger, rather than a smaller record. More people need to be informed. Position papers, minutes, follow-up orders, all kinds of procedural forms must be produced after the most secret of conferences in order to implement the results or explain the positions taken to those in the government with a need to know. A delegate at Geneva does not need to be instructed in writing, since he talked with Secretary Rusk just last evening in Washington, and perhaps saw the President briefly this morning before he flew to Europe. But he must carry with him a mass of paper buttressing his position and providing the ammunition for his interminable negotiations, and a significant number of people within the State and Defense Departments must be informed of the instructions he carries and the results which may be expected.

"On second glance, the problem may appear to be not one of lack of documentation at all. Rather, it is three other problems: the documentation is secret and we shall have to wait a long time for it; the documentation is massive and is buried beneath tons of 'counter-documentation' sometimes designed to conceal or confuse it--press releases, inspired stories by reporters, speeches and communiques; and the pace is hurried, the amount of maneuvering, meeting, and message-sending fantastic, the sheer volume of the research challenge almost insuperable.

"This is to suggest, then, that the damage done to the historian's cause by the new gadgets may have been overstressed. It may well be that the problem seems large

to us because we are in a hurry to know. Had we sought to study the Washington administration in 1800, we should have been hard put indeed to come by adequate documentation. It may well be that, by the year 2000, documentary research in the Kennedy or Eisenhower administrations may appear more rewarding than anything we have been able to do in those of Lincoln or Grant or Jackson.

"New skills will be needed and new problems must be faced. Our generation of historians would do well to concern itself about the problem of dealing effectively with tons of material, about the problem of discriminating between the document and the 'counter-document.' . . .

"If the problem of documentation is not quite so radically challenging as has been thought, there is also some doubt that oral history can do very much about it. There are essentially two problems. First, memory. If we are to seek to reconstruct specific conferences or the exact thought patterns of government officials on certain days we immediately run into two rival frustrations. If we go to the participants quickly, we discover them already confused, and needing some guidance from the record; we are unable to provide that guidance, for the record is still closed. If we wait until the interviewer can do thorough research in the manuscript, many of the participants will be dead, all will have become forgetful with time, and the memories of all will have become embedded in the pattern of subsequent events and writings. Secondly, the problem of security and good taste. The discretion which has prevented participants from making a written record may well prevent them from making an effective oral record. It may be that they will be even more discreet in an oral situation. . . . If 'x' is unwilling to say in a letter that one of his prominent colleagues was an alcoholic, is he more likely to do so on tape? Sometimes, perhaps, but by no means always. Certainly much depends on the nature of the interview, the respect commanded by the interviewer, the security precautions written into the agreement, and the degree of confidence the subject has in the whole process.

"All this is not to argue that oral history is not worth doing. It is merely to suggest that its role in solving the supposed crisis in historical documentation may be considerably less than we have been led to believe.

"But if oral history's contribution to the problem created by telephone and airplane may turn out to be something less than revolutionary, it may well make significant contributions to two other concerns of the modern research historian. First, the matter of volume. Until or unless we can discover ways of reducing extensive documentation to machine-processed codes or of doing effective team research, it will remain almost impossible to work systematically through the agency or bureau papers which we need in order to deal effectively with the operation of

modern government. Oral interviews with key figures may well be used, among other things, to find the clues, the keys, by which these massive files may be used effectively. It may be that we shall find ourselves going more to the interview to find a guide through the papers than, as has always been good practice, going to the papers to establish a guide for the interview. This may become significant also with the matter of classified materials. Under current rules, and probably for the foreseeable future, there are significant amounts of materials which might be opened if and when a research man identifies their existence and specifically asks for a ruling on them. Oral history interviews may in the future play an appreciable role in guiding historians to the documents which need to be sought in this process of security review.

"Secondly, the problem of the 'personality cult' in American history. For a half-century now we have been aware, as a profession, of the dangers of 'great man-oriented' history. We have worked hard at the study of movements, processes and institutions, of ideas and forces. But since World War II we have in fact been moving back more and more to the great-man orientation. We write in terms of FDR, Truman, Eisenhower and now Kennedy.

"There have been many reasons for this subtle reversion. But one of the more compelling is the fact that we have the papers of FDR and Truman and that the press centers on these figures. We are drawn to view NRA from the White House because we come to it through Roosevelt's papers. We begin to view the Eightieth Congress through Truman's steel-rimmed glasses because the papers at Independence are open while those of the congressmen are scattered and closed, and those of lesser figures may not even have been saved. Oral history may have an increasing function in saving us from that powerful warping of history that has necessarily come from approaching political history through the White House door and from our preoccupation with the written and with the large-scale. New vistas may be now open to the historian with the wit and perseverance to apply oral history techniques to the study of local situations, social, cultural and intellectual. Similarly, oral history may play a larger role in bringing together the political memoirs of lesser figures. Effective and thorough interviews with administrative assistants, with bureau chiefs, with lower echelon political workers, may go a long way toward restoring us to a balanced political history, liberated from preoccupation with the mirror images of Presidents."

## APPENDIX IV

## REPORT ON THE ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION AT THE PROVINCIAL ARCHIVES OF ALBERTA*

> Since 1966 the Provincial Archives of Alberta has actively engaged in a programme of tape-recording interviews with old-timers and early settlers in the province and with Albertans who have distinguished themselves in various walks of life. These verbal reminiscences frequently contribute much information which is otherwise not documented. Occasionally, as a result of the interviews, informants have put pen to paper and have produced a written narrative of their experiences and recollections. Donations of family letters, diaries, correspondence and photographs have also followed upon talks between interviewers and informants.
>
> (from the introduction to "Helps in Recording . . .")

The collection of audible documents at the PAA includes many recordings of interviews, and a few reminis-

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* based on information obtained from the auditioning of several tapes (see AUDIBLE DOCUMENTS section at end of BIBLIOGRAPHY for full particulars), and from transcripts, synopses, and "Informant" and "Subject" card files at the PAA; also from: Proceedings of a Conference on Tape Recording Held at the Provincial Museum and Archives of Alberta, Edmonton, Monday 24th April 1972; Provincial Archives of Alberta, "Helps in Recording Local History by Tape-Recorded Interviews," January 1974, [4] pp.; "Provincial Archives of Alberta: Preserving Alberta's Documentary Heritage," Leaflet no. 2, Alberta Culture, Youth and Recreation, Heritage Resources Development Division, n.d.; and from conversations with the following: Alan D. Ridge, Provincial Archivist, in April 1973; Esther Kreisel, then Reference Archivist at the PAA, in October 1974; and John Gilpin, the present Reference Archivist, in February 1976.

cences recorded by individuals themselves, as well as songs and other recitations--all done especially to make a permanent record of the material and of the voice of its author and/or performer. The collection also includes some recordings of actual events (e.g. radio talks, religious and civic ceremonies, legislative debates, proceedings of conferences) which have taken place in the 1930's or later. It is a large collection, comprising in excess of 1500 tapes.

The PAA has listed accessions of phonotapes for every year since its founding in 1963. But its declaration of active interest in the material a few years later (see above quote) is reflected in the rising tide of accessions, from 1967 onward, of both "deliberately-historical" and "actual-events" recordings. Some of this material is the byproduct of research ventures for theses (e.g. Den Otter's interviews in the Coal Branch) or for published works (e.g. MacGregor's interview with an Athabaska Trail freighter). But the bulk of it seems to have been produced "for its own sake" (that is, to save a few more aspects of our heritage from oblivion), rather than for immediate use of any sort, by the various groups or individuals who have ventured, the first of them in the mid-1950's, to produce it. Members of the Archives staff have themselves undertaken to produce such recordings, sometimes on their own initiative when they have seen the opportunity to do so, and sometimes when they have been

specially requested to do so by individuals or groups in the Province. The PAA has also offered advice and lent equipment to private individuals and groups who wish to make recordings of interviews or events, in return for copies of the recordings these projects yield. From time to time, as budgets permit, the PAA has contracted with free-lance interviewers to open new areas of documentation and to build up already existing ones in its oral history collection.

These tapes of actual events, and of retrospective interviews with men and women of Alberta, contribute in greater or lesser degree to the documentation of a great many aspects of our past. One can learn from them about the origins, early experiences, later careers and present views of scores of pioneers and old-timers, both "eminent" and "ordinary". From their own words or the words of their colleagues or children, one can add colour and detail to what other forms of documentation already tell about the career and home and social lives of bush pilots, businessmen, doctors, farmers, musicians, politicians and teachers.

The oral history collection at the PAA can no longer be said to suffer from lack of promotion and use. In the first two months of 1976, for instance, in excess of 300 reference requests of all kinds were received by the PAA, a great many of them concerning genealogy or local history; and the oral history collection is always

one of the sources recommended, along with photographs, manuscripts and public documents, to researchers inquiring into these subjects. So the collection is indeed being used, though it is difficult to say exactly what use has been made of which tapes (or the synopses thereof) and by whom; for most of the work done from the oral history collection has simply not been of the sort that is widely circulated or well-footnoted. Another kind of use made of this collection, as of others, especially the photographic collection, is by those who for sentimental or similar reasons simply want to hear the voice, as they might want to see the picture or read the writing, of someone they knew or had heard of. This use by the "merely curious" would of course produce no concrete results, the way research use usually does; but it is a legitimate interest, and not to be despised. The PAA, as a public archival institution, finds itself obliged to permit, even if it cannot encourage, this kind of use of its oral history holdings.

Access to any item in the collection is not difficult, and "ancillary documentation" is in every case quite adequate. An extensive "Subject" card file indicates what matters are mentioned or discussed in the phonotape collection. There is a separate card for every mention of every topic, and only the topic and an accession number is printed on each one. It is to this index the researcher would normally go first, unless he already

had in mind an informant he wished to hear. A file of "Informant" cards indicates just whose words are to be found in the collection. These cards each state, in addition to the informant's name--be this one person's, a group's, an agency's, or an "occasion's" (e.g. "Canadian Centennial" or "Alberta Golden Jubilee")--the general subject dealt with, the interviewer or recordist, if other than the informant, the date of the recording, and of course the accession number of the material (which the archivist will need to retrieve the tape, and which the researcher will need to look up the synopsis).

It is wise to check the synopsis for further details on any tape one finds listed in the "Subject" or "Informant" indexes, and which one thinks one might want to hear. The synopsis alone may provide all the information one requires. There are synopses for all items in the collection; these have been bound in order of accession number and are available, along with the above-mentioned indexes, in the Archives Reference Room. The synopsis gives several particulars about a tape: for instance, who was interviewed or recorded, by whom, and when; the period and general topic covered, and the duration of the tape; and warnings, where appropriate, of poor technical quality (rare), of the fact that the tape may be in a language the prospective listener might not understand (there are some interviews as well as songs in languages other than English), and of any restrictions on access (there

are very few, and these are clearly indicated both on "Informant" cards and synopses). No particulars about the interviewer, or about whether a given interview was part of a series or whether it was prompted by some special occasion, are given in the synopsis, though one can guess at some of these things from the neighbouring synopses (interviews in a series usually come into the hands of the Archives all at once). Also, one might in desperation, and with permission of the Reference Archivist, look at any correspondence and notes on the tape in its accession file, to learn more about these matters. Phases of the narrative, names and topics mentioned, and the like, are listed in point form in each synopsis. No tape footage or time indications for these points are given (this is regrettable, for although everyone will concede that these are clumsy and inexact measures, they would have been some indication of the emphasis given each point by the narrator). Still, the points have been worded specifically enough that in no case is it necessary to listen through a whole tape to find any particular point--and anyway, there is something to be said for listening to at least a little of the context of that point. One may find noted at the end of the synopsis that the PAA has other related material--photographs or papers from the informant, for instance--or a transcript of the tape in question. (There are very few transcripts, and these have been made by interviewers who were keen on them. The Archives has no

transcription programme, and researchers seem happy enough with synopses and tapes.)

Facilities for listening to material from the oral history collection at the PAA are excellent.

The remainder of this report will be taken up with a description of, and some comments on, the tapes I listened to at the PAA. I did not try to assess the extent or estimate the quality of oral history documentation on any given topic, though one cannot help noticing the abundance of material (both series and isolated interviews) on pioneers and old-timers, and on Alberta politics; also that series of interviews have been done on topics as diverse as: music in Alberta (by D. Goede and R. Hryciw), Polish immigration to Alberta (by M. Szymczak--interviews in the Polish language, but synopses in English), and teaching in northern Alberta (by E. Kreisel, with members of the Congregation of Sisters of Providence). Nor did I seek permission to hear any of the (only three) restricted interviews. My "sampling" (a smaller, if no less arbitrary one than it would have been if I had allowed myself more time), and a few observations follow:

(1) Recordings of "actual events" (a 1937 radio talk by Solon E. Low on the economic theory of Social Credit and the thwarting of its practice in Alberta; and addresses by Prime Minister St. Laurent and Premier Manning at a cairn unveiling during Alberta's golden jubilee year, 1955). One could read the texts of these speeches and therefore know

what they said, but one can only imagine, without hearing them, how they were delivered. Incidentally, there has been a significant increase in PAA holdings of this kind concerning Social Credit, in the past year.

(2) Reminiscences recorded by individuals (statements by Charles Margolus, businessman, about life as a Jewish immigrant, taped in 1962-63; and a short personal biography by Christopher Mundy, cartographer, 1972). It must not have been easy to draft a synopsis of the Margolus statement, as the recording is of very "poor technical quality". It illustrates the lack of facility of many people with recording equipment rather better than it documents recollections of past events. The Mundy recording, on the other hand, is of excellent technical quality. But it, too, is a very brief statement, apparently read aloud; and it contains "little of why and how, and much of what." One could wish an interviewer had been there to ask him for more background and detail.

(3) "Early" oral history interviews (with Mrs. Bourassa, Dr. Sutherland and others, early settlers in Peace River, by A. R. Patrick in 1956; and with Robert E. Campbell, Banff outfitter and M.L.A., by E. S. Bryant in 1957). The A. R. Patrick interviews with Peace River old-timers seem to have been recorded at a gathering of some kind. They are more hurried and superficial than they might have been if done more privately. The E. S. Bryant interview with Robert Campbell (2½ hrs. in 2 sessions) was a happy combin-

ation of an excellent narrator and an adept interviewer; it is on a par with any "later" interview.

(4) Interviews with the same subject by different interviewers (Lt. Col. Philip Debney, civil engineer, first by N. Radford in 1969, then by A. C. Milroy in 1972). Radford asked for and got more detail about Debney's impressions of early Alberta people he met, and about his own experiences as a civil engineer with the railways. Milroy, also an engineer and military man, asked for and got more detail about the technical side of Debney's work, and about his later military and professional career. The interviewer does indeed make a difference!

(5) An interview with an internationally-known Albertan (Dr. Chester Ronning, by E. Kreisel, then of the PAA, in 1970). If this instance is at all representative, such individuals are quite at ease in an interview situation. Ronning is a great raconteur. Throughout the interview (4½ hrs. total) Ronning's own personal experiences are interspersed with historical and political explanations of events about which, as a resident of and diplomat in China, he has much first-hand knowledge and many strong opinions.

(6) Interviews that were part of a series or project (Sister Jeanne Thérèse Belanger, teacher, by E. Kreisel in 1972; Mrs. E. Hilda Dawson, about settlement early in this century and about teaching, by S. Ingram and B. Necyk, "team interviewers", in 1973). Mostly "ordinary" interview subjects who will obligingly answer questions but do

not take much initiative. Sr. Belanger, when prompted, had a lot to say about her personal experience of teaching in northern Alberta mission and separate schools in the 1950's and 1960's. The "team interviewing" by Ingram and Necyk seemed rather to overwhelm Mrs. Dawson: too many questions, perhaps, and not enough time to answer them. It is probably easier to establish rapport one-to-one, and a more coherent interview is likely to result.

(7) "Recent" oral history interviews (Sgt. David A. Dunlop, about his career in the A.P.P. and R.C.M.P., by C. Ursenbach (who calls his enterprise "Western Oral History," and transcribes all his interviews) in 1974; an extensive interview with Mrs. Bernice E. Hollinshead, about her early life, early Edmonton, and activity in the Local Council of Women, by S. Ingram (contract interviewer for PAA) in 1975; and Dr. John W. Scott, former Dean of Medicine at the University of Alberta, also by S. Ingram in 1975).

(8) "An interview with an interviewer" (Mrs. Naomi Radford (nee Watt), who has done many interviews for the PAA in the 1960's and 1970's, interviewed about her memories of her early life, her parents, and early Edmonton, by A. D. Ridge, Provincial Archivist, in 1975). This interview, and the Hollinshead interview mentioned above, were done in more than one sitting; in both cases, interviewers and interviewees took advantage of later sessions to clarify or elaborate on points raised in the earlier session.

## APPENDIX V

## THE (U.S.) ORAL HISTORY ASSOCIATION "GOALS AND GUIDELINES"*

"The Oral History Association recognizes Oral History for what it is--a method of gathering a body of historical information in oral form usually on tape. Because the scholarly community is involved in both the production and use of oral history, the Association recognizes an opportunity and an obligation on the part of all concerned to make this type of historical source as authentic and useful as possible.

### Guidelines for the Interviewee

"1. The person who is being interviewed should be selected carefully and his wishes must govern the conduct of the interview.

"2. Before undertaking a taped interview for the purpose stated above, the interviewee (or narrator) should be clear in his mind regarding mutual rights with respect to tapes and transcripts made from them. This includes such things as: seal privileges, literary rights, prior use, fiduciary relationships, the right to edit the tape transcriptions, and the right to determine whether the tape is to be disposed of or preserved.

"3. It is important that the interviewee fully understand the project, and that in view of the costs and ef-

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* "Appendix C" in William W. Moss, Oral History Program Manual, New York, Praeger, 1974, pp. 98-99. Also to be found in Willa K. Baum, Oral History for the Local Historical Society, Nashville, Tenn., AASLH, 1974, pp. 46-47; Amelia R. Fry and Willa K. Baum, "A Janus Look at Oral History," American Archivist, vol. 32, no. 4 (1969), pp. 322-23; and as an appendix to Alice M. Hoffman, "Oral History in the United States [a paper given in Britain in 1971]," Journal of Library History, vol. 7, no. 3 (1972), p. 285.

fort involved he assumes a willingness to give useful information on the subject being pursued.

Guidelines for the Interviewer

"1. It should be the objective of the interviewer to gather information that will be of scholarly usefulness in the present and in the future. The interviewer who is collecting oral history materials for his own individual research should always bear in mind this broader objective.

"2. In order to obtain a tape of maximum worth as a historical document, it is incumbent upon the interviewer to be thoroughly grounded in the background and experience of the person being interviewed, and, where appropriate and if at all feasible, to review the papers of the interviewee before conducting the interview. In conducting the interview an effort should be made to provide enough information to the interviewee to assist his recall.

"3. It is important that all interviews be conducted in a spirit of objectivity and scholarly integrity and in accordance with stipulations agreed upon.

Guidelines for Sponsoring Institutions

"Subject to meeting the conditions as prescribed by interviewees it will be the obligation of sponsoring institutions to prepare easily usable tapes and/or accurate typed transcriptions, and properly to identify, index, and preserve such oral history records for use by the scholarly community, and to state clearly the provisions that govern their use."

## APPENDIX VI

## REPORT ON THE GATHERING AND USE OF ORAL TESTIMONY BY THE TREATY AND ABORIGINAL RIGHTS RESEARCH PROJECT OF THE INDIAN ASSOCIATION OF ALBERTA*

The Treaty and Aboriginal Rights Research project (T.A.R.R.) of the Indian Association of Alberta is part of a federally funded programme for "Indian Rights and Treaty Research" authorised by Order-in-Council in 1972. T.A.R.R. has involved up to 15 staff and consultants in Treaty Areas No. 6, 7, and 8, in Alberta, and in Ottawa. Work was begun in the fall of 1972 and is expected to be completed in spring 1977. The findings of all the archival and field research undertaken are to be used in the preparation of reports, and possibly court argu-

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* based on information obtained from: an interview I had (and recorded only sketchily in notes) with Richard Lightning, Assistant Director of Field Research, at the I.A.A. offices in Edmonton, 23 April 1975; a telephone conversation with Richard Price, T.A.R.R. Director, 24 April 1975; several conversations with Dr. John Foster of the U. of A. History Department, a consultant to the T.A.R.R. project; and various T.A.R.R. working papers and reports, also from the spring of 1975. Some details in this report were corrected and updated by Richard Price in February 1976. The quotation in the final sentence is from Robert M. Carmack, "Ethnohistory: a Review of its Development, Definitions, Methods, and Aims," Annual Review of Anthropology: Vol 1, 1972, Palo Alto, Calif., Annual Reviews, Inc., p. 236.

ments on treaty and aboriginal rights. (An instance in which these findings have already been used, apparently to good effect: a caveat has been filed on behalf of the isolated communities of Treaty 8, north of Lesser Slave Lake, based on a T.A.R.R. project research report.)

T.A.R.R. has done "over 250 elders interviews in the three treaty areas." These interviews were undertaken in search of Indian elders' recollections or traditions about events leading up to the signing of treaties, about the actual process of signing, about their understanding of the mutual rights and obligations involved, and about fulfilment or lack of fulfilment of treaty provisions. The elders were also asked specifically about their ancestry, and about where they had lived; about whether they had ever had, or lost, treaty status; and what, if anything, that status had meant to them. T.A.R.R. interviewers could either approach these elders directly, because they already knew them, or indirectly through chiefs' councils, etc. Interviews were conducted both with individual elders and with groups of them together, and always in the elders' own language. The interviewers were almost always well received, and the interviewees quite willing to be recorded on tape. Though "every second visitor [to the reserves] has a tape recorder," the T.A.R.R. interviewer's problem was not that of being refused by the people he approached on account of "previous exploitation"; rather, it was that of having to explain to everyone that

what he wanted was recollections about past events and present understandings of them--not the songs, legends, etc., that most researchers armed with tape recorders come looking for! Explanations given were understood clearly enough, so that--at least as far as one would expect "on ten minutes' notice"--the elders had a good memory of the information the T.A.R.R. interviewers were asking for. The information they got often jibed well with what the Public Archives documents in Ottawa contain. On the matter of what the treaties meant giving up, in terms of land, the elders indicated anywhere from a six-inch (one hand's) to a two-foot depth of earth, which would imply that they understood they were giving up land for agricultural use.

These interviews for historical information were all relatively brief and to-the-point, rather than wide-ranging in scope. Nonetheless, the social chit-chat and joking, the repetitions and digressions have generally been edited out of these interviews in the process of translating and transcribing them. The interviewers, who must do this job themselves, say that the time it takes to produce even a summary transcription in English is quite staggering, perhaps 6 hours to 1 hour of interview, and that they would never get the job done in the time available if they scrupulously translated and transcribed word-for-word. The full taped record of all interviews has been kept, so the possibility of more elaborate transla-

tions and transcriptions being done later or by others is not precluded.

Obtaining a complete translation of these interviews in spoken or transcribed form and doing some re-interviews with key elders (while the people are still around who can understand and explain the literal and symbolic significance of some of the more puzzling statements made in these testimonies) may not be terribly crucial to the immediate objectives of T.A.R.R.--the preparation of position papers and perhaps court arguments. But it will be important so that younger generations of Indians, not to mention non-Indians, whose education has given them a Euro-Canadian outlook on the past, will have evidence of the ways in which some Indian witnesses to and participants in the signing and implementation of Treaties 6, 7, and 8 saw and understood the situation.

The T.A.R.R. project's tape recordings and other valuable records (such as its microfilm copy of the Alexander Morris collection) will probably be retained in an Indian archives. On the other hand, the PAA might house this material on the same basis as it does the records of the Oblate Missionaries, that is to say on a permanent loan basis, with research use being cleared through the lender--in the case of the T.A.R.R. material, the Indian Association of Alberta.

The T.A.R.R. project's work, by bringing archival and oral documentation on the subject together, has

undoubtedly achieved "a much more accurate and realistic interpretation of the agreements made than that provided by the treaty document [itself]" for each of the three treaty areas under study. The project's work is also a contribution to the development, for western Canada's Indians, of "a history comparable to that produced by [Euro-Canadian] historians [for themselves], and not merely the broad patterns of cultural history"--that is to say a history complete with <u>specific</u> names, places, and dates, rather than one of vague impressions.

## APPENDIX VII

## ON OBTAINING SUFFICIENT "ANCILLARY DOCUMENTATION" SO AS TO PERMIT "CRITICAL ANALYSIS" OF RECORDED ORAL TESTIMONY*

". . . . The aim of the person who uses the record [of an interview] is to know what are the accretions and the distortions so that he would know what actually happened insofar as it is recorded. Critical analysis is the tool used to discover this. It can be made much easier if certain items of information besides the testimony and about it are available. It is therefore of great value to collect this ancillary documentation together with the oral testimony itself.

"For the purpose of discussion one can break down the subject matter in[to] a consideration of the [witness'] perception of the events, their transmission, and [finally] the interview . . . .

The Perception of the Events

"1. From the testimony itself it is possible to distinguish between what the witness actually saw and what he heard or what he inferred. It is also possible to separate his comments about the events from his relation of the events themselves. The distinction between what was seen and hearsay is as important here as it is in the courtroom. But an interviewer should not stop a witness. For hearsay can point to rumors existing at the time of the events (they are themselves events) and inferences can be very illuminating too. What the interviewer will do is ask the interviewee if this or that part of his testimony is hearsay, inference, or direct observation, when this is not clear from the testimony itself.

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* most of an article by Jan Vansina, "The Documentary Interview," in the symposium "Oral History in Africa," African Studies Bulletin, vol. 8 (September 1965), pp. 9-13.

"2. The perception of events is colored by the degree of participation in them and by the general interests of the observer. It is important to know if he is an accidental observer (passer-by saw the riots), a purposeful observer (knew something was up), or a participant observer (sat on the platform during the meeting or made the speech). In the first case, the observation is limited because the observer did not know enough about the background; in the second, it is marred by the degree of expectation--some unexpected happenings may have been overlooked or reduced to a subordinate level; in the third, observation of others is hampered by participation, at least to a degree.

"3. The general interests of a person color his observations very much. It is therefore of importance to know something about the person of a witness. How intelligent is he (very important to assessment or understanding of the events), how artistic is he, what are his idiosyncrasies if any, what has been his status in life, etc. The interviewer can often supply elements of information about all of this.

The Transmission of the Testimony

"1. An eyewitness does not usually just see an event and then store it away until the interviewer comes. Very often 'the story' is news at the time it happened, and it excited the witness. He was telling it to family or friends hours after it happened. He felt important and satisfied because he was the lucky one 'who saw it all.' His own role or the way he told the story does not matter much. The audience looks only for the 'news.' If this happens, the memorization will be affected by these first 'releases' in that they help to make a pattern out of the observation so that it can be memorized. And the pattern, of course, emphasizes the most sensational bits.

"Sometimes the events were secret or at least nonpublic and really not sensational at all. Yet it is likely that the informant did not simply store them away. He might have told a close friend or his wife about them in the course of everyday conversation, and he would be likely to release the stories at a later stage of his life, sometimes because it is good for an older person to reminisce, sometimes to assert his ego because he played an important role in the events. Sometimes he started telling the story fairly soon because of its comic or dramatic qualities. The reward here is that the audience would be spellbound by the esthetic quality of the storytelling itself. All these things influence both the form and the content of what is memorized. 'Sensational news' often becomes a 'saga' of the great happenings and is easily contaminated by other accounts at about the same time; sometimes official versions of it are circulated and mix

with private recollection. Reminiscences are rather like the boring stories our grandfathers tell about 'when we were soldiers' or 'when we had this incredible winter,' etc. Ego-bolstering stories are certainly very easy to recognize, and the spellbinders show an esthetic construction where the tension is built up during the story and leads to an unforeseen climax.

"Now most of these things are in the testimonies themselves and can be retrieved directly. But in every case it is important to ask the witness about the frequency of release, the number of times he told the story before the interview. Every time a story is told, it becomes more crystallized, more of 'a story' than a witness account. For instance, a witness of an accident questioned four or five times by police, reporters, etc., soon starts using whole sentences over and over again. On the other hand, if an event witnessed was practically never told, time may have obliterated part of the memory, exactly because the material was not organized enough to be kept memorized easily. Apart from frequency of release, age of witness at the moment of the interview is important too because older people reminisce and reconstruct their memories by doing so.

"2. Further, all memories are affected by such things as status of the person at the moment of the events and its further evolution, age at the moment of observation and time elapsed, sex because of its association with status, etc. A short biographical sketch of a witness always helps to understand his testimony.

The Interview

"1. The interview is a dialogue involving two persons. The full dialogue should be recorded, not only the answers. And like any dialogue on a stage this one takes place in a certain atmosphere, which colors the document. So the interviewer should note the interview situation: e.g., tense confrontation, master/pupil; announcing to the world/recording reverently; etc. He should also note particular reactions to particular questions (nervousness, long delays before answering, etc.).

"2. Like any document, interviews should be 'placed' and 'dated.'

"3. If there is rapport, it would probably be wise to conduct two interviews with the same person, one with a tape recorder, one without. The tape is very often the 'official,' 'public' meeting, the other the more private one, and the document is affected strongly by this. Or it can be the reverse with some informants, who forget that a tape is running. A good way for a nontaped interview is to have a chat, without note taking but where the interviewer memorizes what has been said for a few hours. Or

else a note pad can be used. The advantage of a taped interview is that it records what the witness says; a written or memorized interview records only what the interviewer thought the interviewee said . . . and more in the last instance than in the second one!

"4. Questions asked should be open ended. It is almost always necessary to ask some 'leading' questions to get the interviewee to broach his topic. But they can be very general. No question should normally be of the 'isn't it?' type which is both leading and close ended.

"5. During the interview one or more spot checks on the accuracy of the interviewee should be made. One type of spot check checks the memory of the informant with a written record; for example, he is asked to recall what he said in a speech in 1925 of which written copies are extant. Another type of spot check is to test the sensitivity of the interviewee to questions. An 'isn't it?' type of question containing information known by the informant to be erroneous is asked. If the person agrees, it is clear that he is easily influenced by the questions. But it may also be true that an informant is still very sensitive to questions, even though he rejects all suggestions, because he systematically contradicts the interviewer. As soon as there is anything systematic about the reaction to questions of the 'isn't it?' type, there is suggestibility to a serious degree.

"6. Sometimes informants do not want to talk alone but testify only in a group. The interviewer should be aware that their testimony reflects their knowledge about the events only in part, insofar as there is consensus between the interviewees about it. The very fact of a collective interview, however, points to the likelihood that there are variant versions and that the testimony is important enough in present-day life to warrant a special protection, so that the 'official' statement only should be known.

"7. Finally, an interviewer should always respect and protect his informants. He should not, therefore, tell Mr. X that Mr. Y contradicts him 'and what about that?' because this could lead first to a good deal of deceit and then to the creation of ill feelings between people who will often have to live together after the interviewer is gone.

An Oral History Project and Critical Analysis

"The major interest a historian has in the planning of an oral history project is to make as certain as possible that all independent sources are tapped, and are kept independent. Now the interviewer very often finds himself entering into a circle of people who know each other quite well, although they may not ever have talked about their

memories or at least not for a long time. They know each other because they participated in common events; they are few because they are old. The interviewer is usually an elephant in a china shop, and must realize it. Often enough the first man to be interviewed races out to the others to tell them what happened, and very soon the whole group knows what questions will be asked and has debated what answers should be given. This sometimes is done with the best of intentions. One isn't always certain, and one goes out to ask one's friend who has been there as well. Sometimes there are situations when informants do not feel too safe and would prefer to have a consensus among them concerning what the interviewer should be told. In all these cases these people are no longer 'independent' sources. Their testimonies cannot be cross-checked anymore so that when they are in agreement the probability that they are correct is not very high. To avoid this reaction it may be wise to arrange interviews in such a way that all are blocked in a limited amount of time to prevent off-stage arrangements. It is also always necessary to be suspicious about this possibility and record all evidence which might substantiate it. The sheer length of an interview is often an indication here. The shorter and 'meatier' the interview, the greater the likelihood that it was expected and rehearsed. The dating of interviews is very important here because it can indicate how certain interviews are partly 'dependent' on others.

Conclusion

"The major thing the interviewer needs to use is common sense. Whatever can be useful to find out bias in the testimony, or to assess its accuracy as a document, is very useful to the person who will study it later."